ISABEL CARLETON'S YEAR

Margaret Ashmun

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BY

MARGARET ASHMUN

ILLUSTRATED

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To
ISABEL ASHMUN ROBERTS

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"No," Isabel replied, biting her lip to keep it from quivering. "If it isn't one thing, it's another. There's always something that I just *have* to do with my money" . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Won't you take em all, Isabel?" stammered a humble voice. "I'd like to give 'em to you, if you'll only not be mad" 120

"It was lovely of you to come," she said feelingly, "and it has been beautiful to have you so much to myself" 200

ISABEL CARLETON'S YEAR

CHAPTER I

A RING AND SOME OTHER THINGS

ISABEL CARLETON rushed into the sitting-room without stopping to take off her hat and coat; her cheeks were pink with cold and excitement, and her soft blond hair was blown about her face.

"Oh, mother," she began, "you'll never guess! I've found something that I just can't live without."

Mrs. Carleton, a slender brown-eyed woman, was turning sheets to make them wear longer, and she was surrounded by shining white billows. She looked up from threading the machine, to smile at the girl's eagerness. "Well, what is it this time?" she inquired quizzically. "It seems to me that a good many things are absolutely necessary to your existence."

"But this one *is*," said Isabel, coming over to the window, where her mother was making use of the last afternoon light. "Oh, goodness, mother, my muddy shoe went right on the sheet. Dear me, what a nuisance I am!"

"Never mind," said Mrs. Carleton, trying not to looked annoyed. "Tell me what you have discovered."

"It's a ring," replied Isabel breathlessly—"a

chrysoprase ring. I never knew what that stone was, before. It's green, you know — the clearest, freshest green —"

Professor Carleton looked over the top of the book that he was reading. "The tenth foundation stone of the New Jerusalem was of chrysoprase," he remarked mildly. "You remember that, don't you, daughter?"

"Y-e-s, father, I suppose so," answered Isabel. "But, mother, there were three stones — a large one in the middle, and a smaller one on each side, and they were set in silver, with cunning little leaves and buds around them."

"Where did you see this wonderful ring?" asked Mrs. Carlton, tucking a seam under the "foot" of the machine.

"At Miss Titus's; you know she has that new gift-shop on State Street. I was in there after school with Caroline Harper — she was getting a brass bowl for her mother — and I saw the ring, and I just said right out, 'Oh, that's my ring!' It seemed as if it went with all the green bows and belts and things that I have, and my green silk afternoon-dress." Isabel's light hair and clear complexion made her partial, with something of girlish vanity, to "her colour," as she called it.

Her mother was beginning to run up the seam, and she spoke loudly, above the hum of the machine. "I dare say it costs a good deal, Isabel."

The girl's face fell. "It was only ten dollars — all hand-made, you know, and so *distinctive*, mother.

I knew father couldn't afford it, but I thought if I saved it out of my allowance —"

Mrs. Carleton smiled. Isabel's allowance never lasted very long. "It might take quite a while," she said fastening the thread at the end of a seam, and reaching for another sheet.

"I arranged — I mean, I asked about that," the girl replied hastily. "Miss Titus said that if I paid two dollars, she'd keep it for me — not sell it to anyone else, at least — and then I could pay the rest when I'd saved it."

Mrs. Carleton frowned over the white linen. "That sounds a good deal like buying things on the installment plan," she said slowly.

Professor Carleton looked up, turning his page absently. "What does the child want, Laura?" he asked. "Is it that set of Swinburne that she was talking about yesterday?"

"Oh, father," cried Isabel, "it wasn't Swinburne; it was William Morris. But I want this a whole lot worse."

"It's a ring," explained Mrs. Carleton —"a chrysoprase ring."

"Well," said father, returning to his Dante, "I should think she might have a ring. Doubtless there are other young women who have them."

"I'm afraid you'll have to buy it all yourself," said Mrs. Carleton thoughtfully. "I wish I could help you, but you know father has to go to a meeting of the Classical Association — he reads a paper there — and Celia has to have her front teeth

straightened, and that costs so much —" She sighed, and began to gather up her sewing, glancing at the clock.

"Oh, it's Thursday, isn't it?" cried Isabel guiltily. "And Olga is out, and I was going to get the dessert ready, and make the salad-dressing. May I try to buy the ring, mother? I have two dollars that I could pay for it now."

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Carleton. "Get it if you can, of course. But don't be too much disappointed if you have to give it up."

"I won't," said Isabel, and she ran to hang up her wraps, humming as she went a bar from *The Wearing of the Green.*

In a few minutes she came back, buttoning her blue gingham apron over her school dress, and continuing to hum.

"Do you know, mother," she said, fastening the last button, "I was just thinking to-day that when Christmas and New Year's are over, and we get into the middle of January, it seems as if everything is finished for the rest of the year — as if there's nothing left to happen. And now here's the ring for me to think about, and who knows what next?"

Mrs. Carleton had turned on the light, and was folding the sheets into a neat pile. "Yes, no end of interesting things will happen before next Christmas," she said. "Why, Isabel, you may be in Europe by that time, with your chrysoprase ring on your finger."

Isabel laughed. "You think of the most impossible thing you can, don't you, mother? Going to Europe is the dream of my life — too lovely to come true. But perhaps I'll have the ring, even if I am right here in old Jefferson, pegging away, a green freshman in the University."

"And there's your high-school graduation to come between," said Mrs. Carleton, taking up the muddy sheet, to put it into the laundry-hamper. "You mustn't forget that."

"I did, for a minute," sighed Isabel. "June seems so far away. We were going to have sliced oranges for dessert, weren't we? I'll get 'em ready in a jiffy."

She hurried to the kitchen, where she was soon peeling the oranges, and slicing them into a glass bowl. The scent of the fruit filled the room, dominating the savoury odour from the oven.

Mrs. Carleton came out into the kitchen, and turned the roast, and put on the potatoes, which the careful Swedish maid had left peeled in a pan of cold water.

"Where are Fanny and Celia?" asked Isabel, busy with her work.

"Up stairs," answered her mother. "Celia wanted Fanny to paste new paper on the walls of the doll's-house dining-room. I suppose that's what they're at. I wish Fanny would come down. I want her to set the table."

"Perhaps she will in a minute," said Isabel ab-

sently. She was thinking of something else than dinner.

The Carletons lived in a college town in the Middle West — a delightful little city, very old, as Middle Western cities go, and modelled after the New England villages from which most of the inhabitants or their parents had come. Two beautiful lakes crowded close upon the town, their sloping banks covered with groves of pine and maple. The irregular streets were lined with elms, and almost everybody had a lawn and a garden.

At the time that our story opens, Jefferson was under its annual fall of heavy snow, now damp with January thaws. The winters are severe in the Middle West, but the lives of young people are none the less happy for all that.

The Carleton home was comfortable but not luxurious. The Professor's salary was not large, and the wants of growing girls were many. Isabel often felt impatient with the self-denial that the family had to practise. On this particular evening, she was feeling more than ever the irritation of limited means.

"Oh, mother," she said, as she finished slicing the oranges, "it does seem hard not to have the things you want so dreadfully. Doesn't it?"

Mrs. Carleton stood a moment with the basting-spoon in her hand. Her face was placid and satisfied. "I'm always so happy when your father and you children are well and contented," she said,

" that I don't worry about the things I don't have. It seems to me that I have a very great deal. I don't know that things to wear count for so very much, Isabel."

Isabel shook the sugar-scoop impatiently as she sprinkled the yellow heap of orange slices. " Yes, they do, mother," she cried —" they count for an enormous lot when you're seventeen. Of course, I know they aren't really anything when you compare them with fathers and mothers and good health and such things; but, dear me, you sort of take fathers and mothers and good health for granted, you know. You have those, anyway, no matter who you are."

Mrs. Carleton was mixing flour and water in a bowl, in order to thicken the gravy. " I suppose so," she laughed. " Most of us have some of the things you mention."

" And I can't help it," Isabel went on, " I do love things to wear, Mummy,— swishy things, and lace, and cunning little sashes, and pretty pins, and rings, — the odd unusual sort of ring, that people look at and wonder about. Don't you know? They keep glancing at it, and then they say, ' Pardon me, but what an unusual ring you're wearing. Did you get it abroad? ' Don't you think that's fun, mother? "

" What's fun? " cried Fanny, bursting into the kitchen, sniffing the savour of the roast. " Goodness, how hungry I am! What's fun, and what about rings? " She came over to the table, and began to eat the shredded cocoanut that Isabel had

set out to sprinkle the oranges with. Fanny was thirteen, a lean, dark, lively girl with bright eyes and straight black hair.

"Don't, Fanny," said Isabel, pushing aside the brown fingers that were dipping into the box; "there won't be enough for the dessert, and it's so much better with cocoanut."

"But it's so awfully good. Give me just another handful. I'm starving to death."

But Isabel had caught up the box and was holding it behind her.

"Stingy!" said Fanny crossly.

"Set the table, Fanny," interrupted Mrs. Carleton, "and you'll forget that you're on the verge of death from starvation. Hurry, dear. It's almost half-past six, and we don't want the evening to be too short, for you girls have your studying to do."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Fanny, taking an apron from behind the kitchen door, "it's always study and dig — almost every evening. I hate that Latin grammar. Why do I have to study Latin, anyway? Anna Paul doesn't. Her mother says —"

"I can't listen now, child. Set the table quickly. Your father thinks it best for you to study Latin, and that's reason enough, I'm sure."

Fanny went slowly into the dining-room to lay the table-cloth, and came back with the wicker tray for the dishes. Isabel was mixing a French salad-dressing, and Mrs. Carleton was putting the lettuce on the salad-plates.

Celia came to the door and peeped into the kitchen,— a small slim figure in a short dress of black-and-white check, with red pipings. Her brown curls fell over her shoulders, and her blue eyes were sweet and intelligent.

Isabel glanced up. "Come on in, ducky," she called, beckoning. "Here's something for you."

The child ran to the table, her face brightening. "Open your mouth and shut your eyes, And I'll give you something to make you wise," Isabel chanted, while Celia shut her eyes so tightly that her forehead was strained into hard lines; and her mouth was wide open. Isabel dropped into it a bit of orange, well sugared and powdered with cocoanut.

Celia's eyes opened, and she gurgled with pleasure. "Thank you, Fairy Princess," she said, laughing; then she dived under the table for Bobo, her big grey cat.

"Take this butter in and put it on the table, kiddy," said Isabel. "No, indeed, you mustn't carry Bobo at the same time."

Little sister, holding the glass dish of butter-balls carefully in both hands, walked importantly into the dining-room.

Presently she came back. "Call father, Celia," said Mrs. Carleton, who, her face flushed with being near the stove, was pouring the gravy from the roasting-pan into the bowl. "And see that the nap-

kins are on the table, and the chairs in place." This time Celia caught up Bobo; his white paws and his white-nosed face hung over her shoulder, and he purred loudly as he rode away.

"Oh, dear, dishes to wash after dinner," sighed Fanny, taking off her apron. "I wish Olga didn't have to go and see her sister every Thursday."

"How would you like to stay in the kitchen here all day?" asked Isabel coldly. "I think if you had to, you'd be glad to go and see *your* sister."

"It'd depend on which one it was," Fanny replied, shaking the last crumbs out of the nearly empty cocoanut box. "Even staying in the kitchen would be better than —"

She looked up and caught her sister's eye, and she and Isabel both burst out laughing. "Come on, Cross-patch," said Isabel. "When you've had some roast beef, you won't be so savage."

"What was it about the ring?" asked Fanny, fastening a gold pin that had come loose at the back of Isabel's collar. "You didn't tell me."

"I'll tell you when we're washing the dishes," answered Isabel mysteriously. "It's a gre-at secret."

"Come on, girls," called Professor Carleton, from the dining-room. "The banquet waits." They heard the scraping of the carving knife on the steel sharpener.

"It's a beauty," added Isabel, as they pushed open

the swing door. "When you see it, you'll turn green with envy."

"Well, I'll wait till I see it, then," said Fanny, sceptically, letting the door swing to, behind her.

CHAPTER II

HALF A DOZEN ADVENTURES

THE next day, which was Friday, was a very busy one, and Isabel found no time to go to Miss Titus's till after school was out in the afternoon, and even then she was delayed by a conference with her English teacher. She hurried down to the gift-shop, and stood outside for a moment, looking in at the window. A beautiful blue bowl gleamed on a brass tray, and a length of Chinese embroidery in faded red trailed over an old mahogany writing case. "So many things that I want," sighed the girl. "But the ring — the ring!"

Miss Titus, a pleasant-faced young woman with waving auburn hair, smiled knowingly at Isabel from across the room, where she was arranging some gaily flowered cups and saucers.

With a flutter of importance, Isabel laid down two silver dollars on the counter. "The chrysoprase ring," she said, as Miss Titus approached. Miss Titus went to a small glass case, and brought the ring, which, with other treasures, was lying in a tray of black velvet. Isabel hardly glanced at the lapis-lazuli and topaz ornaments, so eager she was to see again the ring that had been her choice. She took it up with a gentle hand, and turned it round

admiringly, holding it so that the light shone through the stones.

"It looks like drops of rain on a green leaf, doesn't it?" she cried. "It seems even lovelier to me to-day than it did yesterday."

"Put it on," said Miss Titus, with an appreciative smile.

Isabel slipped the handsome silver circle upon her finger, where the beauty of the craftsman's work showed doubly fine against the white skin.

"The band is a bit large," said the woman, taking Isabel's hand in hers, and examining the ring. "We might have it altered to fit a trifle better."

"It's perfect as it is," answered Isabel. "I like to have it large, so that I can feel it slip around, and know it's there."

"Do you want to take it with you?" asked Miss Titus, getting out a paste-board box with silver printing across the cover.

"Oh, no," returned Isabel quickly. "Oh, no. I shan't take it till I've paid for it. I might lose it, or something. Mother wouldn't like me to take it, I'm sure."

"You may if you want to, you know."

But Isabel refused. "No, I shouldn't feel right about it," she said.

"Then I'll give you a receipt."

Isabel tucked the bit of paper into her purse, with a happy glow. "I'm going without everything till I get the ring," she smiled. "I'm sure it won't be long, either."

She lingered, with the feeling of the privileged purchaser, and looked about at the medley of objects in the shop,— an old mirror in a mahogany frame, a quaint blue-and-white china tea-pot, odd wicker baskets, Japanese prints, a brass samovar, an East Indian table-cover, gay Austrian plates and flower-pots, richly figured chintz cushions, brass candlesticks, a wonderfully embroidered Chinese mandarin coat, a clear corn-yellow pitcher: such an array of interesting things that Isabel could scarcely tear herself away. The art instinct in her reached out for these attractive bits of colour and line. She sighed again in spite of the slip of paper in her purse, thinking how hard it is to deny ourselves the things we long for. "But I'll have the ring, anyway," she murmured exultingly.

She went out into the street, with a pleasant vision of the time when the green rain-drops should sparkle on her finger, to the admiration of Caroline and Molly and the other girls, when they should behold its "distinctive" splendour.

As she walked slowly up State Street, she caught glimpses of herself in the store-windows,— a slender, bright-faced girl in a dark green coat, and a wide grey beaver hat with green velvet bows and silver buckle. The street was a queer mixture of the old and the new, with its irregular rows of buildings, where sedate sixty-year-old shops stood hand in hand with young up-standing ones of fresh cream-coloured brick. As Isabel looked back, she saw the last light of the sun tipping the gilt figure on the

white marble dome of the Capitol; and as she walked on, she could discern, nearly a mile before her, the more sober dome of University Hall, the oldest of the college buildings on the Hill.

The streets were wet and sloppy, but up and down them passed closed cabs and clanging street-cars, farmers' "cutters," delivery wagons, slowly crawling loads of four-foot wood, and now and then a big motor-car, ploughing its way through the snow. A long "bob-sleigh" passed, too, full of school children out for a sleigh-ride,— shouting, blowing horns, and making the wild uproar that among young people indicates the happiest sort of good time. Once, at least, in the winter, each class expected to go for a sleigh ride, and revel in a supper afterward, usually at some small town a few miles from the city.

Isabel recognised one of the children in the sleigh, and waved merrily. Then she turned to look into the windows of a flower-shop, and met Molly Ramsay, a bright-eyed girl with red cheeks and black hair. She and Isabel stopped to talk, though they had been together in the high school all day.

"Buying out the stores?" queried Isabel.

Molly held up a parcel. "Yes; a ball of crochet cotton and two yards of red ribbon," she laughed. "All I could find the money for. Whew! how one's allowance goes, doesn't it?"

"Simply melts away," answered Isabel feelingly. "Look at that window. Wouldn't you like to rush in and carry away an *armful*?" A mass of pale

pink carnations banked the front of the window, and shaded into the deeper rose of azaleas tied up with rosier gauze.

"I should say," assented Molly absently. She did not care for flowers as much as Isabel did. "But I'd rather carry away an armful of that." She pointed to the heap of candy in the next window, where the lights had just been turned on. Luscious brown chocolates, and candied nuts and fruit were ranged about loaves of nougat, sprinkled through with raisins, citron, almonds, and cherries. "Don't you love the Pal?" she added impulsively.

"Yes, I do." Isabel replied rather wistfully, gazing at the delicious things in the window of the Palace of Sweets — popularly called "the Pal;" "but mother doesn't think it's nice for young girls to go in there without an escort or a chaperon, and the candy's so expensive just to buy by the box,— so I don't get a chance to go in very often."

"Neither do I," confessed Molly, her eyes on a pile of *glacé*-ed pineapple and orange-peel.

"When I get rich, I'll send you a bushel of candy every day," said Isabel.

"And when I marry a millionaire, I'll send you a cart-load of roses and azaleas every morning," responded Molly gaily.

"Hurry up and find him," Isabel cried, and they parted, laughing.

Isabel stood a minute after Molly had gone on. "I'll get mother a tiny bunch of marguerites," she thought, feeling in her muff for her purse; and then

she stopped. She had left nearly all her money at the gift-shop as a deposit on the ring. "Oh, dear," she sighed, "no more posies or anything till I've paid for my jewels. I'll have to be dreadfully selfish. No presents for anybody,— and that's pretty hard."

Just then she saw Rodney Fox on the other side of the street. She knew him even in the dusk, by his way of carrying his shoulders, and by the light grey cap he was wearing. Usually the University freshmen were obliged to wear green caps, with red buttons, but this particular tyranny of the sophomores was relaxed in cold weather. Rodney had been in the high school with Isabel, but had finished the course last June, and was now in the University. He raised his cap when he saw Isabel, and then motioned her to wait while he came across the street. Isabel stood at the crossing, jumping up and down, because her toes were getting cold with tramping through the slush, even in her heavy shoes and rubbers.

"Awfully glad I met you," said Rodney, coming up. He was slender but tall and well proportioned, with dark brown hair, fresh red cheeks, and hazel eyes that looked one squarely in the face. "Just getting home from school?"

"Well, I stopped to do an errand or two," said Isabel. "How horribly early it gets dark, doesn't it?"

"Yes; and it's getting good and cold, too. Don't you want to come into the Pal and have some hot chocolate?"

"Oh, I'd love to, Rodney. I was beginning to get hungry,— and it's quite a while yet to dinner."

"Gee! how hollow a fellow gets between lunch and dinner!" laughed the boy. "At least I do. I don't suppose girls ever do anything so vulgar."

"Don't they?" returned Isabel, tucking up some stray blond locks. "You've known me long enough to be pretty sure that I'm always ready to eat."

Secretly, she felt rather excited at going into the "Pal," even with so good a chum as Rodney. This was the hour when it was full of University students, brilliant young persons in gay costumes, who seemed very much grown up and at their ease. Isabel couldn't help feeling dazzled as they entered the big confectionery shop, with its rows of yellow-shaded lights, and mirrors where one kept seeing oneself over and over; its glittering cases of candy, shelves of glasses, and marble soda-fountain; its gay paper flowers and streamers and favours and college banners, and its generally gorgeous and "city-fied" air. As they went down the long aisles to the section where the tables were arranged, she peeped into the mirrors to see if her hat were on straight, and her hair in good trim.

"Over here in the corner," said Rodney. They sat down at a little square table, near the fire-place where a coal-fire burned redly. A maid in a white apron took the written order that Rodney scrawled on one of the blanks furnished for that purpose. Isabel looked around as she drew off her gloves.

"How warm and gay it seems, after the dusk and snow!" she exclaimed happily.

"It's some place, isn't it?" answered Rodney. "Great joint for the studes."

The room seemed very full, and it rippled with the sound of chatting and laughter. There were college girls in stylish suits, and furs thrown back from fresh merry faces and white throats. Some of the girls wore bunches of roses or violets at the front of their jackets; and one tall languid creature in a dark purple suit and lynx furs was wearing two lovely jewel-like purple orchids,— flowers that one did not often see in Jefferson.

"Isn't she a picture?" murmured Isabel breathlessly.

Rodney turned his head and glanced at the self-conscious beauty. "Well enough," he answered, "but there are others." He turned back and smiled at Isabel across the table. "I'm better pleased with what I see from here," he added.

"Oh, Rod, aren't you funny!" said the girl, incredulously; but she felt a glow in her heart just the same. She continued to let her eyes wander about the room, while the maid placed the chocolate and wafers on the table. After she had noted the costumes of the young women, Isabel gave tardy heed to the young men, very square-shouldered fellows, in well-fitting, stiffly-creased suits, and correct neckties. It seemed as if they were all handsome and well-groomed, though the lights may have been responsible for the attractiveness of some of them.

"What good times you college people have," said Isabel, with a half-sigh, stirring the hot chocolate, with its whipped cream and melted marshmallow on top.

"Yes, we do have the time of our lives," assented Rodney. "Great Cæsar, this is hot! We do have mighty gay times,— but you haven't any idea how we dig and slave. I never dreamed what work was like, when I was in the high school. Why, I've studied till twelve o'clock every night this week. Don't you see how pale and haggard I'm looking? I think I'm going into a decline." His glowing cheeks and clear flashing eyes were scarcely those of a sick man.

"You certainly look delicate!" laughed Isabel. "What else have you been doing — besides burning the midnight electricity, and cramming your brain with knowledge?"

"Nothing much since I saw you last. Ski-ing a little, but the snow's too soft now. No dances or pink teas this week. It's too bad, Isabel," he said regretfully, "that your mother doesn't let you come to our fraternity parties. I'm going to ask her again pretty soon. Maybe she'll change her mind."

"Oh, I do hope she will let me, just once. But I'm afraid I'd be frightened stiff among all those college people. I'm sure I shouldn't be able to dance, or to utter a word."

"Oh, bosh! You'd have 'em all skinned a mile, — beg pardon, Mademoiselle! I mean you'd outshine the entire assembly."

"Not I. I'd be petrified."

"Well, we'll try it and see. If you petrify, we'll set you up among the palms for a statue,— and that wouldn't be so bad, either."

"There's no use in talking about it," said Isabel wistfully, "for mother doesn't think I ought to go until I'm out of the high school."

"I believe she will let you go once or twice," said Rodney, "and I'm going to ask her before long. By the way, that's one of our men over there,— just getting up. I spoke to him when we came in. Guess I've pointed him out to you before. That's Fred Delafield,— best dancer in our frat. Good student, too — fine fellow. Entered as a Junior this year. I want you to meet him sometime."

"I'd like to. He looks nice. Who is the girl with him?"

"Evelyn Taylor. She's a splendid girl — you'd like her, too. Oh, I *wish* you were in college, Isabel!"

"Well, I *shall* be in college pretty soon," answered Isabel ruefully, crumbling a wafer. "And this has been a good year so far. I've enjoyed it. You know I've been having a very good time. And it's nice to have college to look forward to. I think it's beautiful to be expecting something delightful — trips to Europe and diamond tiaras, and all sorts of things. I believe that expecting happiness is the best part of life." She wanted to tell him about the ring but she thought he might consider her vain and silly.

" I guess you're right, lady," said Rodney.

When they had finished their chocolate, and Rodney had received the check, for which he was to pay at the desk, they rose, somewhat reluctantly, and went out again, between the rows of lights and mirrors. The arc lights outside were flaring and sputtering in the cold blue twilight, and all the sunset colouring had faded from the sky.

" Ugh," shivered Isabel, fastening her squirrel neck-piece, " it certainly is getting colder."

" Just right for sleigh-rides," answered Rodney. " With a hot chicken-supper afterward."

They walked along, chatting, to the Carleton home, where they parted with a gay " Good night! " Isabel ran up the steps and into the warm dimness of the hall. It seemed good to be at home, even after the pleasantness of " the Pal." Leaving her wraps in the hall-closet, she hurried upstairs. There was a light in her mother's room, opposite her own.

" Is that you, Isabel? " called Mrs. Carleton. "I'm dressing to go out for dinner. You know your father and I are invited to the Mitchells'. Won't you come in and hook up my dress for me? "

" Surely, mother." Isabel went into her mother's pretty grey and pink room, where Mrs. Carleton was standing before the looking glass, and Celia was curled up on the window-seat with an illustrated book from the school library.

" I'll never have another dress that fastens in the back," said Mrs. Carleton. " It's too much of a nuisance."

"No, it isn't, mother," responded Isabel, beginning to hook up the cream-coloured voile gown; "we all just love to do it for you, and it isn't a bit of a nuisance. You're a duck in this dress, too,—" she stopped long enough to give her mother a kiss under her ear.

"It's getting rather *passée*," said Mrs. Carleton absently. "You'll look after Celia, won't you, dear? Don't let her eat too much dessert, and put her to bed early —" She paused, to pin her collar with an old-fashioned cameo brooch.

"You'll be good, won't you, honey?" said the big sister, going over to sit down by Celia, who snuggled up against her.

"Yes, of course I will," answered the child. "I won't be any more trouble than a mouse. Oh, read to me out of this book, Isabel."

But just then the doorbell downstairs rang with a quick whir that told of an impatient hand, and presently a high girlish voice floated through the hall. "It's Caroline," called Fanny from below. "She wants to see you, Isabel."

"Oh, come up, Caro," answered Isabel, hanging over the banister. "Mother's dressing, and I'm up here."

Caroline bounded up the stairs, and the two girls went into Isabel's room; a simple and dainty room it was, with its hand-woven rag rugs, and its cretonne hangings and white furniture.

"Oh, Isabel," cried Caroline Harper, with a jump of excitement, "I had to come over and tell

you. What do you think?" Caroline was always full of enthusiasms. Though very plump and rather plain, with sand-coloured hair, a sharp chin, and irregular teeth, she always had an expression of keenness and animation.

"I don't think at all," laughed Isabel, "because I don't know what there is to think about. Do hurry and tell me, Caro-kins."

"You know Ellery came home yesterday —" Ellery was Caroline's half-brother, ten years older —"and he's made some money somehow or other — I never understand just how those things are done — up in British Columbia. And he told me when I got home a little while ago, that because he'd had this good luck, and because he couldn't get home for Christmas, he wanted to give me a celebration now." She stopped, out of breath, and beaming at her companion.

"Oh, how splendid!" cried Isabel. "And what is it going to be, Caroline?"

"Why, we talked it over, and decided on a sleigh ride to Middleton, with supper afterward — and we can dance for a while, till it's time to come home."

Isabel sat down on the edge of the bed, and clasped her hands. "Oh, Caro, how lovely!" she exclaimed. "We've said so many times lately that we ought to have a sleigh ride, and now this is so perfect!"

"Isn't it?" said Caroline, taking dance steps between the rugs. "There'll be about ten of us —

you, and Mollie Ramsay, and Rodney Fox, and Eric Thomas, and one or two others. And Fräulein Ewald will chaperon us — I called her up. Isn't El a dear?"

"Isn't he going with us?" asked Isabel.

"No, he thinks it wouldn't be good for his rheumatism that he got out there in that wild and woolly country. The doctor says he's got to be careful."

Just then Mrs. Carleton came to the door in her long coat, and with a lace scarf over her head. She smiled happily when she heard the plan, which both girls were telling her at once. "That'll be no end jolly," she said, fastening the loops on her coat. "Won't you stay to dinner, Caroline? The girls are going to be here alone."

"No, thank you; I must run over and see Molly. Well, to-morrow night, then, Isabel. I'll call you up and tell you when we are to meet. Mother says to take plenty of wraps."

Isabel followed her to the head of the stairs. "Thank you for inviting me," she said.

"As if I wouldn't!" answered Caroline. "How nice you look in that dress," she added, half-enviously. The blue serge school dress, with white collar and cuffs, set off Isabel's fine features, smooth skin, and wavy gold hair. Caroline could never quite forgive her friend for her slender prettiness.

Isabel flushed. "It's the same old dress," she smiled. "Well, I'll expect you to call me up when things are all settled."

"Yes; good night," said Caroline, and she was

gone, with a flutter of skirts, and a backward trill from the hall door.

After their father and mother had gone, Isabel and Celia went down stairs. "Dinner's late," said Celia, "'cause the groceries didn't come, and Olga's kind o' cross."

"Then we'll have to be very good and not make her any crosser," said Isabel. "You sit here at the table and look at your book, while I study my lessons a little for Monday." She turned on the light in the sitting-room, above the round table, with its neat piles of books and magazines. It was a pleasant "homey" room, with some old family-furniture, a portrait of Great-Grandfather Carleton, plenty of book-cases, a flourishing sword-fern, and a canary in a brass cage at the window.

For a few minutes, the two girls were very quiet with their books. Certain appetizing odours came from the kitchen, and the subdued rattle of Olga's kettles and pans.

"Sister," said Celia, throwing her book aside, "I want my little red chairs."

"What little red chairs?" asked Isabel, running through the names of the Romantic poets. "I suppose I ought to learn a date for each of them," she sighed. "What chairs, kitten?"

"My doll-chairs that father painted for me. They looked all scrubby, you know, and father got some paint and painted 'em all nice and shiny."

"Oh, yes," said Isabel, still with her mind on her

book; "I heard him speak about them. Where are they?"

"Down in the basement, in father's work-room. He left 'em down there to dry."

"Fanny'll go with you, I think. I want to get my lesson for Monday. Be a nice little lady, and don't tease."

Celia ran to the study, where Fanny was trimming kodak pictures, and presently both the younger girls went through the sitting-room on their way to the basement. There was sound of chattering, and then quiet, emphasised by the humming of the telephone wires in the wind.

All at once, Isabel, deep in the biography of Robert Southey, heard a scream from the basement, and then shriek after shriek in Celia's shrill voice. Dropping her book, Isabel ran in terror to the back hall, and down the basement stairs. Wails from Fanny were mingled with Celia's anguished outcry.

Halfway down the stairs Isabel paused weakly. In the dim light of the basement, she could see Celia jumping up and down frantically, while from the top of her head, red rivers of blood poured down upon her shoulders and dripped heavily to the floor. She was standing, apparently, in a pool of gore. Isabel's heart seemed to stop beating. "Oh, she's killed," she whispered, clinging to the stair-rail.

Fanny was making dabs at Celia's head with her handkerchief, and Bobo, whom Celia had brought down with her, was standing stiff-legged and wild-eyed, his tail nearly as big as his body.

Olga, following Isabel, remained petrified at the head of the stair. "Is the little one dead?" she asked in a stifled voice.

"What is it?" gasped Isabel, clinging to the stair-rail and trembling all over.

"Paint!" snapped Fanny, lifting the sopping handkerchief and letting it fall on the floor. "Red paint. She pulled it off the shelf."

Celia began to scream more loudly than ever, with her eyes shut and her arms held straight out, her fingers spread wide apart. Isabel laughed hysterically, so great was her relief that the child was not mortally injured.

"You needn't laugh," said Fanny, her voice shaking.

"Ow, Isabel's laughing at me," howled Celia, flapping her crimson hands. "Isabel's making fun of me."

"No, I'm not, darling," Isabel protested, coming to the foot of the stairs. "But I thought you were all bluggy — and I'm so glad you aren't. What in the world shall we do?"

Olga came unsteadily down the stairs, with the pepper-box in her hand. Her round Scandinavian face was full of distress. "My! my! ain't it yoost awful?" she cried. "Yoost look at her hairs, an' her pretty dress that your mama made for her. It's so awful bad, I ain't never seen nothin' like it. Wait. I get a cloth, and wipe her head."

Isabel gingerly unbuttoned the smeared dress, and unpinned the lace collar, now dabbled with paint.

Celia's screams subsided into a whimper. Olga brought a cloth, and Isabel wiped the red rivers from the child's curls and her small scared face. Fanny began to clean and comfort the gory Bobo.

"Oh, dear, something always happens when mother goes away," groaned Isabel. "How *did* you do it, Celia?"

"It was on the shelf," said the child, catching her breath between the words. "And I thought I'd like to see how it looked — my chairs were so pretty — an' Fanny was looking at father's tools — an' I reached up — an' it just came tumbling all over me." Her voice broke into a quaver; and then she asked in sudden terror, "Oh, Isabel, will it ever come off?"

"Not for weeks," broke in Fanny, whose mischievous spirit was beginning to return. "Weeks and weeks," she went on. "You'll look like Bosco the Wild Girl, and folks'll pay ten cents to come and see you."

Celia began to jump up and down and scream again. "Oh, I can't go to school," she blubbered, "or to Milly Mitchell's party — oh, I can't wear my pink dress — and father won't like me with my hair all sticky!"

"There, there, dear," consoled Isabel, patting the child's shoulder in the knitted underwaist, "it's all right. Fanny was only joking. Mother'll know a way — don't you worry. Doesn't mother know almost everything?"

"Y-e-e-s," sobbed Celia, reaching for Isabel's

hand, "and I wish she was here now. Can't you telephone for her, Izzy?"

"No, we don't want to spoil her good time. We'll get you cleaned up a little, and then we'll have dinner, and we'll all feel better. Don't you worry, Chicken-Little."

Then the procession started up the basement stairs — Olga still holding the pepper-box in one hand, and Celia's drabbled dress in the other, Isabel leading the sniffling child in petticoat and underwaist, Fanny with Bobo wrapped in an old burlap bag.

"Turkentine or ker'sene will take it out, I do believe," said Olga miserably. "My, my! What'll your poor mama say when she comes home?"

In the bathroom, Celia had her face and hands rubbed quickly with kerosene and then washed with soap and hot water. She bore the operation bravely, though her cheeks were almost blistered with their scrubbing.

"There's no use in fussing with her hair till after dinner," said Isabel, drawing a long breath of weariness. "We're all half-starved." So Celia came to the table in her blue wrapper, and with her head tied up in a turban, so that she looked like a very wretched and parboiled little Hindoo. They sat down to dinner long after seven o'clock, and the potatoes were burned and the meat cold. Olga never ceased her muttered lamentations of "My, my!" "Ain't it yoost awful?" and "What will your poor mama say?"

"What a time," groaned Isabel, who was too tired to eat. "I believe I said yesterday that nothing could happen — but I hope we aren't in for anything worse than this!"

"Not if it happens to me," piped Celia, stopping in a draught of milk, to peer round-eyed over the top of her glass. "Haven't I had what you call an 'exciting adventure,' Isabel?"

"I should say you had," sighed Isabel, nibbling at a very-much-too-brown biscuit, "and I think it will last us all for a while."

CHAPTER III

THE SLEIGHING PARTY

"PUT on plenty of togs, Isabel," said Rodney Fox, as the girl came into the sitting-room, where he was talking with Mrs. Carleton and Celia. "You don't want to be brought back frozen to death."

"Well, no," answered Isabel. "I can't say that I do. It might interfere somewhat with the festivity of the occasion."

"I wonder if I'll ever be able to use such big words," sighed Celia, looking admiringly at her older sister, whom she adored.

"Oh, much longer ones," laughed Rodney, "like *ornithorhyncus* and *psychopathology*, and *ethical antinomianism*. Don't you think those are good words?"

"Lovely," said Celia enviously. "You have to know an awful lot to be in the University, don't you, Rodney?"

"Yes, you have to be a compendium of knowledge," answered Rodney, his brown eyes twinkling; "only the professors are usually jealous of you, and won't let you tell all you know."

"I'm sure father wouldn't be jealous," said Celia

seriously. She thought Rodney a rather wonderful person.

"No, I don't think your father *would* be jealous of me!" said Rodney, laughing again, and Mrs. Carleton smiled over her embroidery.

"It's a perfectly scrumptious evening," broke in Isabel. "Aren't you glad you're going, Rod?"

"Well, I should say yes," responded Rodney heartily. "It was pretty good of Caroline to ask me to go with our old crowd."

Isabel went into the hall to put on her wraps. Rodney was wearing a heavy sweater under his coat, and his overcoat and mufflers lay on a chair. He was following the good advice that he had given Isabel.

Mrs. Carleton talked to Rodney about his mother, and then gave him an account of Celia's exciting adventure with the paint. The boy was much amused, and Celia had sufficiently recovered to consider herself something of a heroine.

"So you thought you'd take a swim in the red paint, did you?" Rodney teased. "Pretty hard going, wasn't it — eh? Better come up to the Gym and we'll let you use the tank when you feel like taking a plunge."

Celia flushed and laughed, smoothing back the curls straggling about her face. She could always stand teasing from Rodney.

"How does college go, Rod?" called Isabel from the hall, as she struggled with her overshoes.

"Fine!" answered the boy. "I forgot to tell

you yesterday that I'm going to compete in the indoor track meet next month — the Freshman high jump — some stunt, too, believe me. Elsom says I may fail now, but he wants me to keep in training for the Sophomore meet next year."

"Oh, Rod, I hope you'll get a first," cried Isabel, coming to the door with a red silk handkerchief knotted about her neck, and her tassel cap pulled down over her ears. "You must, for the honour of old Jefferson High."

"I'm not worrying about honours," replied Rodney, smiling over at Mrs. Carleton. "We all expect you to win the honours for Jefferson High, when you get into the University. You'll reap all the glories in sight, and come out with a Phi Bet', and two or three scholarships."

"Not me," answered Isabel, regardless of grammar. But Rodney's faith in her was very pleasant, nevertheless. "I'll come tagging along behind everybody else, I expect. Well, here goes for the 'togs.'"

Rodney jumped up and held her sweater for her, and then her last winter's coat of Scotch wool. "I think we'd better hurry up," he said, beginning to put on his mufflers. "Caroline said we were not to be a minute later than half-past five." They were all to meet at Caroline's house, where they were to pile into the big "bob" that had been hired for the occasion.

"I think I'm ready," said Isabel, drawing on a pair of mittens over her gloves.

Just then Olga came to the door to say that Mrs. Carleton was wanted at the telephone. "Good-bye, dear," said the careful mother, kissing Isabel. "Be a good girl."

"You might think I was in the habit of stealing the spoons," laughed Isabel, as her mother disappeared. "Fanny," she called up the stairway, "won't you get me a shawl from mother's closet? I might need it coming home."

Fanny came running down stairs with a shawl, which Rodney tucked under his arm. "Good night, infants," called Isabel, and she and Rodney went out into the dusk, chattering and bantering each other, in their usual high spirits.

The night was clear and fresh. Although there had been a "January thaw," the weather was rapidly becoming colder. Low in the sky hung a new moon, thin and yellow, with a slight haze about it. Trees and houses showed velvet-black against the dark blue of the horizon.

The sleigh was standing at the gate, when Isabel and Rodney arrived at the Harper house. Muffled forms moved about in the twilight, which was broken now and then by the quick glow from a pocket flash-light.

The sleigh was roomy and comfortable, with straw in the bottom, covered with blankets. Then there were fur robes, and more blankets and steamer rugs. Merry voices exchanged jokes and back-handed compliments, while the boys and girls settled themselves in the conveyance.

"You look like a feather-bed tied in the middle, not very tight," said Eric Thomas jocosely to Caroline, who, wrapped like a mummy, balanced on the edge of the sleigh.

Caroline, who was sensitive about being plump, retorted, "Well, I don't see why you need to twit me of it."

Her voice was so hurt that Eric was covered with confusion, for he had not meant anything but a weak attempt at humour. "Oh, come, Caroline," he apologised lamely, "you know I hadn't any intention of twitting you; I was only joking."

Caroline's answer was drowned in the general gabble.

"Please let me have a square inch of that robe."

"Oh, you stepped on my foot!"

"I had to step somewhere —"

"Yes, do take this scarf; I have another —"

"Mother wanted me to bring a hot soap-stone, but I said —"

"Isn't it lovely of Caroline to ask us?"

"Yes, and so splendid of Ellery!"

"We're going to have a chicken-supper."

"M-m! I hope I get the wish-bone."

And so on, with the cheerful nothings that young people chatter when they are out for a good time. The driver cracked his whip, the bells began to jingle, and the party was off, with a long cheer, and the blowing of horns and whistles. In a short time, they had left the town behind, and were scudding through the country roads, where trees and bushes

overhung them, and sometimes scraped their heads, causing much ducking and squealing on the part of the girls. Here and there a light shone in a farmhouse, and a dog rushed out barking wildly at the intruders.

And all the time, the chatter went on:

"The moon looks like a slice of muskmelon."

"Wish it were —"

"Then you'd be crying for the moon."

"Say, Rod, do you remember the muskmelons we swiped when we were out camping last summer?"

"S-sh! Don't let the girls know — they'd be shocked."

"Oh, now we know what you're up to, when you're off by yourselves."

"Goodness! you're splitting my ear-drums with that horn."

"Well, I'm so hungry, I have to get my mind off my sufferings."

The six miles to Middleton were quite enough, yet none too much for the lively party.

Inside the country hotel, they stamped about, waking tingling feet that had "gone to sleep," unwrapping themselves and each other from their coverings, and blinking in the light of the kerosene lamps. The white-haired hostess and her black-bearded son scuttled about, putting wood into the tall iron stoves, taking overcoats and furs, and bringing in extra chairs, so that those who were very cold might sit a moment and warm their toes.

The party were astonished and perhaps a trifle vexed to find that a group of University students were there before them. "Don't worry," consoled the hostess; "there'll be enough for all of you to eat."

Isabel, her eyes still unused to the light, thought she saw some one that she knew among the college people, but she was not sure. She went into the bedroom opening from the sitting-room, to take off her wraps. Here she was startled to see that the shawl which Fanny had brought her, and which, in her haste, she had not looked at, was one that her mother valued above everything else — a beautiful old Roman-striped shawl, that had been a part of Grandma Carleton's wedding-outfit.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Isabel to Molly Ramsay, "I wouldn't have brought this shawl for anything, if I had known. I feel almost as if I ought to stand and hold it."

"It's awfully pretty, isn't it?" said Molly, glancing at it, and then turning to fluff her hair before the glass. "I don't believe anything will happen to it, though. Don't let it fuss you, anyway."

"Supper's ready!" the word went round, and everybody trooped off to the dining room. A long table stretched down the middle of the room. There were lace curtains at the windows, and on the wall were ugly pictures of dead ducks hanging by their feet, and of huge red watermelons surrounded by hectic peaches, bright purple grapes, and stick-like bananas.

"Did you ever see such frights?" whispered Caroline to Isabel as they went in.

The college group were already at the table when the high-school party filed in. Caroline, flushing with pleasure, had the seat at the end of the table, because it was "her celebration." Fräulein Ewald was beside her, and then Eric Thomas; the others ranged along the sides of the table. Isabel found herself sitting down at the place where the college and the high school groups came together. At her right was Rodney Fox, and at her left the dark young man that she had seen in the Palace of Sweets the day before.

"Ha, Fred!" exulted Rodney, "glad to see you here."

"Well, this is great!" answered Delafield, his eyes on Isabel, who presently was going through an introduction to the big fellow, and to Evelyn Taylor, who sat on the other side of him.

"Oh, I've seen you a good many times, on the Hill and elsewhere," said Miss Taylor, "and I almost feel as if I know you. You're Professor Carleton's daughter, aren't you?" Evelyn's kindly blue eyes and delicate face seemed very familiar to Isabel, too. In a few minutes, all four were talking like long-lost friends.

Even in the midst of the conversation, Isabel noted that there were bunches of pink and red geraniums in painted vases on the table, and that the china was thick and heavy, with occasional nicks. But the food was all that any hungry young person

could ask for. There were platters of fried chicken, and bowls of gravy; piles of hot, puffy raised biscuit; tureens of mashed potato; other tureens of yellow squash, and golden rings of carrot; pickles and jelly; and two huge layer cakes quivering with their fillings of whipped cream.

The hostess and her daughter kept passing the food, and urging modest eaters, filling cups and glasses, and bringing in relays of chicken and gravy from the kitchen.

Everybody, of course, was laughing and talking at once. Isabel was so absorbed in Fred Delafield's account of his last summer's trip to the Canadian Rockies, that she forgot about Caroline and Molly and Eric and the rest, who were keeping up among themselves a fire of good-natured repartee.

"And a whopping big brown bear was sitting in the middle of the trail—" Delafield was saying. Isabel looked up and caught Caroline Harper's eye fixed on her with a queer expression. She wondered vaguely what it meant. Caroline was not eating, and her face was red and strained. She did not look as if she were enjoying herself, and Isabel was for a moment very much perplexed and disturbed.

But Delafield had paused, expecting a reply.

"Oh-h," said Isabel, suddenly coming back to the story, "and didn't you have your gun with you?"

"That was just it — I'd left my 'rusty trifle' at the camp," the speaker went on; "but the old fellow was as much taken back as I was. He stood up

on his haunches and stared at me, and I stood rooted to the spot, as they say in the Diamond Dick novels."

Rodney was listening, too, and asking eager questions, and Evelyn Taylor was chiming in. Isabel soon forgot about Caroline and the odd look on her face.

When the last of the cream-cake and coffee had vanished, they all rose, and the room was cleared for dancing: it had a surprisingly good hardwood floor. Fräulein Ewald and Evelyn Taylor took turns in playing the old piano in the corner, and the black-bearded man accompanied them excellently upon his violin.

After two or three waltzes and two-steps, which Isabel had danced with Rodney Fox and Eric Thomas, Fred Delafield came up to the group where she was standing.

"I've been watching," he said genially, with the pleasantry of an older man talking to youngsters — he was at least twenty-two! —" and Miss Carleton dances the best of anybody here. She's just slender enough, and so light on her feet. She's like one of those birds that just skim the water, but never really touch it. I insist on having a dance with her."

Isabel remembered that Rodney had said, "He's the best dancer in our frat," and she flushed and stammered as she stepped forward to dance with Fred. And then, glancing around at the interested faces of the boys and girls, she saw that Caroline looked as if she had bitten into something very sour.

"Perhaps she thinks I oughtn't to dance with

the college people," thought Isabel uncomfortably; but there was nothing to do but go on. Miss Taylor struck up a rollicking two-step, and Isabel and her partner were off in a wild, light, rhythmical dance.

"You certainly do it well," said the young man admiringly. "It comes as naturally to you as breathing, doesn't it?"

"Well, I was sent to dancing school as soon as I was old enough," said the girl, happy in the recognition of her accomplishment —"and I've always loved it."

"Let me teach you some new steps that I've just learned in Chicago," Delafield said, after they had made a few circuits of the room in silence. "Would you like to learn them?"

"Oh, indeed I should!"

"Well, then, here goes."

He began to teach her some difficult steps, and graceful glides and turnings. Gradually, the others stopped dancing, and crowded around the doorway to watch. Isabel, unconscious of the eyes upon her, gave herself up to the charm and sway of the dance. She even forgot about Delafield himself, merely aware of his perfect dancing and skilful guidance. Rodney Fox smiled and nodded at her as she floated past, but the faces of the others were in a whirling haze.

At last the two stopped, panting and laughing, while a ripple of applause ran around the circle.

"How beautifully Isabel does it, doesn't she?"

cried Molly Ramsay to Caroline, who stood frowning beside the door.

"Oh, yes, not badly," answered Caroline tartly; "but I should think she'd be ashamed to monopolise all the attention. It isn't ladylike."

Molly Ramsay stared. "Isabel not ladylike?" she exclaimed. "Why, that's a queer remark, Caro, when she's always been the most ladylike of all of us."

"Come on, Caro," cried Rodney, coming up just then, "we'll show 'em the way it's done in Paree." And the dancing began again, merrily enough. Fräulein was at the piano, Evelyn Taylor with Delafield, and Isabel with the rather clumsy Harry Kilpatrick.

At eleven o'clock there was more hot coffee, with meat- and cheese-sandwiches; and then everybody began to get into wraps and overshoes again. The sleighs were brought round, with the horses rattling the bells, impatient to be off. It had grown colder, and the moon had gone down.

Isabel cuddled under the robes and thought of nothing. She had had a very happy evening, and was ready to rest. She did not feel like joining in the songs that the others sang — *Seeing Nellie Home,* and *Hot Time,* and *Just a Song at Twilight.* She wrapped herself in a steamer rug, and listened dreamily to the melody, and to the almost inexhaustible gaiety of her companions.

The ride home was swift and uneventful, but the

party were shivering and somewhat subdued before the sleigh glided into town.

Rodney Fox got out at the Carleton gate, and helped Isabel to alight. As she stood on the sidewalk, and shook down her coat, after the cramped position that she had been in during the ride, the girl uttered an exclamation of dismay: "Oh, Rod! my shawl — mother's shawl — the one she thinks so much of! I don't seem to have it. Will you look in the sleigh?"

Rodney pulled the flash-light from his pocket, and rummaged among the blankets. "Not here," he said briefly. "Must have lost it on the road."

"Oh, how could I?" wailed Isabel. "Mother will never forgive me."

"What is it?" asked Caroline peevishly. "Only a shawl? Oh, it'll be picked up somewhere. Your mother won't care."

Isabel was shivering with cold and nervousness. "I must have it," she said. "I dare not lose it. And if somebody finds it, he might be dishonest and keep it. Oh, dear!"

"Isabel, how silly you are!" cried Caroline. "We can't wait here all night. We're frozen to stones as it is."

"Drive on," said Rodney shortly, to the driver. "Don't bother about it."

The man snapped his whip, and the sleigh moved on, trailing a chorus of good nights.

Isabel turned to Rodney in angry surprise at his

indifference; but he had felt what she was thinking. "I'm going for it," he said gently, before she could reproach him. "I'll walk back and hunt for it in the sleigh tracks."

"Oh, Rodney, no! It's too late, and too cold," begged Isabel miserably. "I know you're nearly perishing as it is. I'll just have to take a chance of getting it back by advertising."

"Forget it," said Rodney, in a voice that redeemed the curtness of his words. And then he added in a lower tone, "I'd do a lot more than that for you, Isabel."

Isabel flushed in the dark, she did not know exactly why. "It's awfully good of you," she said gratefully. They walked up the steps in silence. "Good night," said Rodney cheerfully, holding out his hand; "when you wake up in the morning, the Golden Fleece will be in the clutches of Jason."

"I suppose there is no use in trying to head you off," Isabel answered with a mixture of relief and distress. "I only hope that Jason's frozen 'corpus' won't have to be pulled out of a snowbank in the cold grey dawn."

"No danger," laughed Rodney, running down the steps. "Good night, Medea!"

Isabel stood in the vestibule for a moment, and heard him go whistling down the street. Inside the hall, she crouched over the radiator for a long time; she had not realised how cold she was. At last she crept softly upstairs.

When she was braiding her hair for the night, there was a tap at her door, and her mother entered, in a long blue dressing-gown. "All right, sister?" she asked sleepily, going over to turn down the bed for the tired girl.

"Surely, mother," answered Isabel, with a guilty remembrance of the lost shawl. "I said 'Please' and 'Thank you,' and I didn't steal the spoons. You shouldn't have waked up — or stayed awake,— which is it?"

"Well, I wanted to be sure that you were safe at home," smiled Mrs. Carleton, kissing the girl's cheek. "Good night, Little One."

"Good night, Little Mother," said Isabel, returning the kiss, and thinking, "I'll tell her about everything to-morrow."

The next morning, while the family were at their late Sunday breakfast, Olga came in and said to Isabel, "Some one to see you at the front door; he says, tell you it's *Yason*."

Isabel laughed and ran out into the hall. Rodney, red-cheeked and smiling, held out the striped shawl, with, "Here's that prize package, Miss Medea."

"Oh, Rodney, thank you more than I can tell," cried Isabel, clasping the gay folds of the shawl in her arms. "How far did you walk, and how did you find it, and weren't you nearly frozen?"

"Well, if you must know, I walked two miles and back, and I found it hanging on a bush, and I *was*

a little cold — nipped an ear and a toe — but all that doesn't matter. I got the Golden Fleece, and that's the main thing."

"I never can thank you enough. You don't know how much this means." The girl's voice trembled. "I could never have borne it if I had lost grandmother's shawl forever. Mother would have mourned it to the end of her days."

"Then, if you're happy, I'm repaid," said Rodney. "Give my compliments to your mother." He lifted his hat, and vanished down the steps.

Isabel, with the shawl over her arm, returned gratefully to the dining-room. "If I hadn't got it back, I should never have dared to think about that sleigh ride again," she said to herself. She did not know what trouble the sleigh ride was preparing for her, in spite of her recovery of the shawl.

CHAPTER IV

RUNNING FOR OFFICE

THE next Tuesday morning, Isabel was on her way to school. She was thinking of the chrysoprase ring, and wondering how long it would be before she would have the money to pay for it. "At any rate, I'll have a long time to enjoy the ring after I do get it," she said to herself.

Just then she saw Caroline Harper, walking in front of her. She had hardly seen Caroline on Monday, because they both seemed to be very busy. So now she hurried her pace and caught up with her friend just before they reached the High School steps.

"The sleigh ride was fine, Caro," said Isabel heartily. "I hope you told Ellery how much we all enjoyed it."

"I told him that *some* of the party seemed to enjoy themselves a great deal," responded Caroline sourly.

"Why, *I* thought they all did," answered Isabel. "They were all talking about it yesterday. Such a lovely supper, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was all right," admitted Caroline. "Did you find that scarf or shawl, or whatever it was you lost?"

"Oh, yes, it came back," Isabel replied; and Caroline did not ask how.

At that moment two showily dressed girls passed them. They were Seniors, but Isabel had never known them very well, since the school was so large that the students formed separate groups of friends.

Caroline looked after the two girls, and began to laugh. "Oh, Isabel, look," she said in a low voice. "See how queerly Anna Foley and Frieda Becker have their hair done up,— in those funny snails over their ears. They look as if they had cinnamon buns on their heads."

"That's the way those girls from Chicago had their hair done when they visited the classes with Molly Ramsay last week," Isabel replied. "I suppose Anna and Frieda thought it looked nice."

"It certainly is the limit," giggled Caroline. "They ought to be told what frights they are making of themselves."

Isabel was holding to the brim of her hat, in the high wind, as they went up the steps. "Oh, they'll get over it," she said lightly. "Don't you remember when we were in the Eighth Grade we got a notion to do our hair up in knobs on the backs of our heads — until our mothers interfered?"

"Did we?" answered Caroline languidly. "I don't remember, I'm sure. Anyway, Anna and Frieda are dreadfully common girls, and I feel more than ever that I don't want to have anything to do with them." Caroline's father, who was a lawyer, was from the South, and Caroline had often spoken

of the "exclusiveness of the old Southern families."

"There comes Harry Kilpatrick," she went on, looking back down the long hall. "Isn't it too bad that he works in a grocery store after school and on Saturdays? He earns his spending-money that way."

"Why, it's all right if he needs to," said Isabel absently.

"He doesn't, really. His father has money enough, but Harry told me he wanted to begin to do something for himself. Boys that work are so tiresome; they never have time to do anything, and they aren't so free with their money, either, as the boys that don't work."

"I suppose it means more to them when they earn it themselves," replied Isabel. She was thinking of a construction in German that she wanted to puzzle out before the class was called. She felt uncomfortable, too, that Caroline should say such ill-natured things; and she seemed to recall, in an uncertain way, that Caroline had been saying that sort of thing for a long time now. She dismissed the thought, however, when she had hung up her wraps and hurried to the German recitation room.

Fräulein Ewald was sitting at the desk, and Isabel went up to ask her a question. When it was answered, the Fräulein, stout and grey-haired, looked up and smiled at the girl. "I was glad to hear, to-day," she said, "that the Seniors are talking of having you for the class president, for the second semester."

Isabel was surprised, for she had not seriously considered running for the office. One or two of the students had said something to her about the matter, but she had not thought they were in earnest. The classes chose two presidents a year; and being President of the Senior class during its last semester was an especial distinction, because of the activities at Commencement time.

"I should feel honoured, I'm sure, if they should want me," Isabel returned happily.

"You ought to have it," said Fräulein, "because your standings are good, and you are what they call an 'all-round' sort of girl, popular with the different groups. I hope you'll be elected."

Isabel took her seat, excited at the thought of "going in for politics." At luncheon that noon she was glowing and absorbed.

"What is it, child?" asked Mrs. Carleton, who was quick to notice the unusual look in the girl's eyes.

"I'll tell you after lunch, mother," answered Isabel, pinching her napkin into folds with nervous fingers.

Up in her room, she told her mother hurriedly, while she was tidying herself to go back to school. "The girls have been talking about my running for class president," she said, brushing back her hair. "And Fräulein Ewald spoke of it, too; and Eric Thomas told me on the way home from school that I was sure to get it."

"That would be fine," said Mrs. Carleton, sit-

ting down in the willow chair; "but are you perfectly certain you want to go in for it? Those things don't always turn out satisfactorily. You might not be elected, and then you'd feel hurt. You're rather sensitive, little girl." Mrs. Carleton rose to straighten Isabel's collar and smooth the coiled braids.

"Oh, mother, I don't see how anything bad can happen. They can just vote for or against me; and if they don't want me, all well and good. If they do, why, so much the better."

"Very well, if you are sure you want to enter the race; but you must take things like a man, if they don't happen to come out as you want them to."

Isabel laughed, and patted her mother on the cheek. "Now don't you go to worrying, Mother-of-Three," she said. "It will be all right, I'm sure." And she snatched a clean handkerchief, took a last peep into the mirror, and ran downstairs.

That afternoon at school she met Anna Foley in the hall. The girl's hair was plainly braided and brought up around her head with a black bow. "How do you do, Anna?" said Isabel cordially, as she had always done.

Anna looked at her coldly, and passed on without speaking. Isabel was puzzled and alarmed, but she was so busy that she did not have much time to think of the incident.

In the cloakroom, between classes, she found Frieda Becker standing before the mirror, making those useless dabs at her collar that girls seem to

delight in. Her hair also was braided and tied up in front. She turned and left the room without speaking. Isabel felt a painful foreboding in her heart, but she did not confide it to anybody.

The next day, she brought a box of home-made candy to school, as she frequently did. All the girls brought candy, at all times and seasons. She passed her box first to Lois Tucker. "Electioneering candy?" asked Lois, with a good-naturedly satirical smile, taking a large piece of the fudge.

Isabel said nothing. She had not thought that her commonplace box of candy could be regarded as a bid for votes.

Verna Schofield took a piece, also with a meaning smile. "Offer it to the boys," she said frankly. "They can get you a lot more votes than the girls."

Isabel put the box of candy away in her desk. There was a tightening at her throat, and she felt strange and miserable.

During the next day or two, queer things happened. Harry Kilpatrick, who sat next to her in the English Literature class, did not speak to her at all, except to make stiff, or even gruff, answers to her remarks. He even hurried past her on the street, with only the merest and coolest nod. Two or three other people seemed to treat her with a kind of chilly suspicion.

"I suppose I just imagine it," thought Isabel. "The election is making me nervous and self-conscious." She did not talk of the election very much,

except now and then to Molly Ramsay. Caroline Harper had suddenly become warmly friendly again, but she seemed to avoid speaking of the choice of class president.

Rodney Fox came in, one evening, to bring Mrs. Carleton one of the potted hyacinths that his mother was especially successful with, and that she sometimes sent around to her friends.

"I hear they're going to run you for class president, Isabel," he said. "I hope you'll get it, and I feel sure you will. They all like you. You've always got on well with the different bunches."

"I don't know whether they'll want me or not," hesitated Isabel. It seemed foolish to tell what she had noticed of late, because there was nothing really definite.

"Oh, they're sure to," answered Rodney. "Don't you remember what a big vote you got when you were secretary, in the sophomore year?"

"Ye-e-s," said Isabel. "But anyway, I'm not worrying about it." This, however, was not strictly true. She *was* worrying, for she feared the humiliation of defeat.

The day of the election came. Isabel had decided to give her vote for Amy Ellsworth, who, though somewhat pushing, was a kindly and capable girl.

The big English classroom was full of chattering and laughing boys and girls. The last-semester's president had left school on account of a serious ill-

ness, and the vice-president, Edward Whitman, was in the chair. A silence fell on the room when he called the meeting to order.

After the preliminaries, "Nominations for the class president are now in order," said the youth in the chair.

"I nominate Isabel Carleton," said Lois Tucker quickly.

"I second the nomination," added Amy Ellsworth.

"And I," said Harry Kilpatrick, rising, and looking about with something very like a sneer, "I nominate Willard Thoms." Willard was a gay, likable boy, a poor student, but a "good mixer," as the saying is.

The nomination was seconded. Amy Ellsworth and Harold Spears also received nominations.

The voting was by ballot. There was an unusual silence while the votes were being written and collected. The girls whispered to one another, but the feeling of constraint was clear.

Isabel tried to look unconscious of the fact that a number of boys and girls were eyeing her doubtfully or unkindly. She had never felt so distinctly uncomfortable in her life. There was a cold feeling at her heart, that told her that something was very decidedly wrong; but she did not know where the trouble lay. She sat tearing up bits of paper, and talking nonsense in an undertone with Molly Ramsay. Caroline Harper sat on the other side of

the room with Verna Schofield, and did not look at Isabel at all.

At last — after what seemed ages to at least one candidate — the tellers had counted the ballots, and the chairman rose to give the returns.

Willard Thoms was elected. Isabel was defeated by two votes.

"I *won't* show that I care," said Isabel to herself. "I just won't."

She waved her hand in mock ceremony, at Willard, smiled over at Amy, and continued to whisper jokes to Molly, who squeezed her hand, and said two or three times, "Oh, my dear, I *am* so sorry!"

"It's all right," said the defeated girl, bravely. "It doesn't make any difference."

"It does, too," whispered Molly in return. "There's something queer about it, and I'm going to find out what it is."

The voting for the other officers went on. Isabel was not suggested for any other position, but Amy Ellsworth was elected secretary.

After the meeting was over, Molly slipped away, her bright face quite set and determined. "Wait for me in the cloakroom, Infant," she said, giving her friend's hand a last squeeze.

Isabel could not trust herself to join the groups that were vehemently talking over the election. She went to her desk in the Assembly Room, taking a long time to collect her books and papers. "I can't cry till I get home," she thought. It was all she

could do to keep back the tears. "Oh, if I had known what it was like, I never should have gone in for it," she murmured, sorting out some notes, without seeing what she was doing. "I don't care so much about losing the office; but there *was* something queer about it — I can't tell what." A bitter sense of injustice made her lips tremble, and her hands shake.

Most of the girls had gone from the cloakroom when she went to put on her wraps. Molly was waiting for her, and drew her out into the corridor. "I think you ought to know, Isabel," said Molly, her voice sharp with indignation, "that it was Caroline Harper who spoiled your chance for the votes."

Isabel's heart gave a jump. She had been, away down in her soul, wondering what Caroline knew about the matter. "How?" she asked, when she could get her breath.

"Why, she told Anna and Frieda that you had made fun of the way they did their hair, and that you said a professor's daughter was too good to associate with their crowd."

For a moment, Isabel stood speechless. Then she burst out wrathfully, "How dare she say such things? It was Caroline herself who talked about their hair."

"And she told Harry Kilpatrick," Molly went on, "that you said you couldn't stand boys that worked — that they were tiresome and stingy. You know Harry works in a grocery store after four and on Saturdays. He was furious, and said you were

a snob, and that he would defeat you if he died doing it. And he said you had always been so nice to him, and he had no idea you were such a hypocrite."

Isabel put her hands over her ears. "For mercy's sake, don't tell me any more. Oh, Molly, it's too awful!"

She would not let Molly walk home with her. "Please, please, Molly, I can't talk," she said. "I want to be alone. I'm not in a fit state of mind to be with any one, not even you." Molly kissed her and went on ahead, leaving Isabel to slip out of the side door of the building. With an unbearable sense of injury and grief, she plodded home through the snow.

Mrs. Carleton was reading in her room, when Isabel came upstairs. She laid down her book when the girl came slowly in and stood beside her. "Dear child!" she said, for she saw at once that something unexpectedly dreadful had happened.

Isabel knelt down and put her head against her mother's arm. "Oh, mother, I've been hurt so!" she sobbed. "I've been so terribly hurt!"

"Did you lose, dear? That isn't so bad. I thought you were going to take it like a man."

Isabel kept on crying, glad of the relief after so long keeping back the tears. "I didn't care about not being president," she wailed. "It isn't that at all."

"Then what is it?"

"It's Caroline. She told things about me that

weren't true. She said that I had said horrid unkind things about some of the class — things that I never dreamed of saying. And they believed what she told them, and they were furious at me, and voted against me." Her voice broke into sobs again.

Mrs. Carleton took off Isabel's hat, and smoothed the bowed golden head. She waited for the tears to spend themselves.

"Oh, mother!" the girl burst out again —"to think it should be *Caroline* — that I'd always trusted and been friends with! To think that she should treat me like this!"

Mrs. Carleton sighed. "I've been wondering about Caroline for some time," she said. "She hasn't seemed as loyal as I could have wished. There have been little things — I couldn't exactly say what — that have disturbed me. Has anything happened lately, that she could feel especially resentful at?"

"Why, no," answered Isabel quickly; and then she added more thoughtfully, "I noticed that she didn't seem pleased that I danced with the college crowd out at Middleton — you know I told you that Rod's friend, Mr. Delafield, taught me some new steps. But I couldn't very well help being pleasant to those people — it happened that I was with them at the table."

"Perhaps you weren't as considerate as you might have been," said Mrs. Carleton, taking Isabel's nervous hand and patting it gently. "It was Caro-

line's party, and perhaps you should have given her more attention."

"Well, maybe I should," admitted Isabel, wiping her eyes; "but even so, I don't see how she could be so cruel. It hurts — it *hurts* so, to have some one that you have trusted do such a terrible thing." Mrs. Carleton did not answer. After a while, Isabel asked humbly, "Do you think there is anything I can do to straighten things out? They seem hopelessly tangled at present."

"I should go to the people that had been misinformed. Did you tell me who they were?"

"Anna Foley and Frieda Becker, to begin with, and Harry Kilpatrick, and I don't know how many others."

"Well, you might go to Anna and Frieda, some day, when you get over feeling so hurt, and tell them that what they heard was not true."

"But they'll think it was, just the same."

"No, I'm sure you can make them understand that you are telling the truth. They'll believe you."

"And Harry?"

"Just tell him, too."

"I don't believe I can bear to say anything to him about it. It seems such an awkward thing to talk about. Won't you speak to him, mother?"

"Why, yes; I'll go to Mr. Crowell's, where he works. I've seen him in there two or three times lately, when I've been ordering groceries."

"And Caroline?" Isabel's tears began to flow again.

Mrs. Carleton looked into her daughter's hurt, drawn face. "Dear child," she said, "it's hard to see you learning that the little school world is like the grown-up world outside. I wish I could shield you from such experiences."

"Young people's hurts are just as bad as grown people's," said Isabel. "Perhaps they don't seem so important after years have gone by, but they are just as hard to bear at the time."

"I know they are, dear; and worse, perhaps, because young people have not learned how to bear trouble. You are too much hurt to say anything to Caroline now. Just wait and see what she says, herself."

"I will," Isabel replied, wiping her eyes and smoothing her hair. "Oh, dear, I'm so untidy, and so worn out!"

"Now, you go and get into your kimono, and brush your hair, and you and I will have tea in your room. I'll go and tell Olga to make it. And after we've had tea, I'll read to you, and you can have your dinner in bed. That'll be nice, won't it? I'm sure you'll feel better when to-morrow comes."

"I always feel better when I've been with you, Mother-Bird," smiled the girl. "And I love tea in the Canton cups, and I love to have you read to me."

Mrs. Carleton went to get the tea, and Isabel, putting on her silk kimono that Aunt Felicia had sent her for Christmas, and brushing her hair thoughtfully before the glass, began to feel soothed

and rested, and to believe the world not quite so black as it had seemed an hour ago.

The next day she was, to all appearances, almost her happy self again; but the bitterness had not quite departed. Caroline was not at school, and Isabel worked hard in the library between classes, and did not have to talk about the election. To Molly Ramsay she said, "We'll talk it over later, when I feel better, but let's not discuss it to-day."

"Of course not, if you say so," said Molly wistfully, offering a consolatory paper bag of caramels, "but I'm just as sorry as I can be."

After lunch Isabel met Anna Foley coming out of the German recitation room, where she had been copying some references. "Come back in here with me, Anna," said Isabel, stepping into the room. "I want to talk to you."

Anna threw up her head, and a defiant look shot into her eyes. "I don't want to talk to you," she said angrily.

"Do come and sit down," said Isabel, taking Anna gently by the arm. "There has been a mistake." Anna came reluctantly into the room and sat down, but her face was hard and cold. "Some one told me," Isabel went on, "that some one else told you that I had said unkind things about you. It isn't true — it isn't true at all, Anna. I never said anything unkind about you in my life."

"We-ell, it seemed to come pretty straight," murmured Anna, without looking up. She was drawing meaningless figures on the tablet in her lap.

"Did you ever hear of my saying such things before?" asked Isabel.

"No," said Anna, "I never did; it really seemed queer that you should do anything like that."

"I wouldn't, and I didn't," answered Isabel. "There was nothing true about it at all." She did not want to hurt the girl's feelings by telling her that Caroline had ridiculed her hair.

"I honestly didn't think you'd do such a thing," replied Anna in a softer tone. "But it sounded so true to life —"

"Then it sounded something that it wasn't. *Please* don't believe it any more, Anna. I give you my word that I never said it."

The girl lifted her blue eyes and looked at Isabel searchingly. "I don't believe you did say it," she said at last, drawing a long breath. "And I'm going to tell Frieda that it isn't true."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Isabel.

"But it doesn't help about the votes," said Anna ruefully. "We voted against you, and got all the girls in our set to do it, too. It's too bad — it's just too bad for anything. We wanted you for president, you know, but we were so mad we couldn't think of anything else."

"Never mind; I don't care about the votes," said Isabel. Her heart was lighter, now that this much of the trouble had been cleared up.

"I'm going to tell Frieda now," said Anna, jumping up.

Isabel went to the window, and stood looking out

across the town, to the University dome on the hill. It was almost time for the German class to begin. Presently Fräulein Ewald came in with her books under her arm. "*Guten Tag,* Fräulein Carleton," she smiled. And then she said in a puzzled way, "I can't understand how you didn't happen to be elected president of the class yesterday."

Isabel did not reply for a moment. "I suppose they didn't want me, Fräulein," she said with an effort. "That's quite possible, you know."

"There must have been something more to it," said the kindly teacher.

Just then the class began to come into the room. Anna and Frieda waved their hands at Isabel as they took their places; and Isabel opened her *Nathan der Weise* with a sense of kindness and relief. She was rather glad that Caroline was not at school, for it would have been difficult to meet her. "She must feel guilty," thought Isabel, "to stay away. Or perhaps the worry of it has made her sick." And then she added to herself, "I'd rather be in my place than hers."

On Sunday afternoon, Isabel was in her room, writing a letter to her grandfather, when she heard Caroline downstairs in the hall. "I can't see her — I can't," she said aloud, dropping her pen and getting up to close the door.

But Caroline was already halfway up the stairs. She burst into the room with a hasty knock. Isabel shrank back against the writing desk, and Caroline,

in her coat and hat, stood staring palely at her from the threshold. For a minute neither of them spoke. Then Caroline burst out, "Oh, Isabel, I don't blame you for not wanting to see me. But I just couldn't bear it — I had to come. I told mother, and she said it was the only thing to do."

Isabel took up her pen nervously, and turned it round and round. She could not think of anything to say.

Caroline was very white, and there were dark lines under her eyes. "I've been so ashamed, I couldn't sleep," she went on in a choking voice.

"But — why —why —?" began Isabel. "How could you —?" She stopped; it seemed almost shameful to talk about such a thing.

Caroline was twisting her gloves in her hands. "I — well, it was just plain jealousy, I suppose. You're better looking than I am, and your standings are better, and you dance better, and somehow, people seem to like you more than they do me. It seemed as if you had everything so sort of easy — that things just came to you, you know —"

"Oh-h!" gasped Isabel. It seemed unbelievable that any one should think of her in that way, when she had to deny herself so much, and the very things she wanted most were so impossible to obtain.

"And at Middleton that night, those college people took you up, as if you were one of them, and they didn't look at me. And then Mr. Stacy told me I was going to fail in geometry, and I probably

couldn't graduate with the class —" Caroline's voice had risen to a wail. "And when the girls began to talk about voting for you for president, I felt so — I can't tell you — didn't you ever feel jealous, Isabel?"

"No, not in that way, I'm afraid. Not like *that!*"

"People who haven't felt it can't understand. I don't ask you to forgive me, Isabel; but I just had to tell you."

If Caroline had cried, Isabel would have pitied her less. But she seemed to suffer too much even to cry. The haggard misery of her face was dreadful. She threw herself into a chair and laid her head down on the desk.

Isabel put her arm around the girl's shoulder. "I can't honestly say that it is easy to forgive you, Caroline," she said. "I trusted you so — I never dreamed that you would do anything like that."

"I never did, either," answered Caroline in a muffled voice. "I wouldn't have supposed I could. You don't know what you'll do until you do it."

"Yes, probably that's true," answered Isabel. And she thought, "What if I were failing in my studies, and couldn't graduate with the class, and I were jealous of some other girl that seemed more fortunate than I was —? Perhaps I'd do something even worse than Caroline has done." Then she said aloud, "Never mind, now that it's all explained. We'll try to forget it, and begin all over again."

Caroline lifted her head. "*I* can't forget it for a century," she groaned. But her colour was coming back, and her face was less drawn and pained. "I want to tell you something. Father says that if I can't graduate, I might as well be somewhere else. And I guess I'm going to stay the rest of the year with his relatives in Kentucky — there's a private school there that they want me to go to. I couldn't bear to stay here and face the boys and girls after what has happened. A lot of them know now, and the rest will know pretty soon."

"It will be easier to go, won't it?" said Isabel. "And you'll have a good time seeing all sorts of new things and new people. But it will seem awfully queer without you, Caro."

Caroline looked up at her companion. "We *can* be friends when I come back, can't we?" There were tears in her eyes now, and her voice trembled. "And you'll write to me?"

"Yes, of course, of course," cried Isabel, pityingly. "It's all right now, and you mustn't think about it. I'll come over to-morrow and find out when you're going."

"Can I slip out without any one's seeing me?" asked Caroline, rising and buttoning her coat.

Isabel peeped into the hall. "The coast is clear," she smiled. "I'm so glad you came over."

"So am I," rejoined Caroline. "But it was hard!" She took Isabel's hand and pressed it, and then went out without saying anything more.

After she had gone, Isabel sat a long time at her desk, before she finished the letter to her grandfather. And as she took up her pen, she said sighing, "I'm just beginning to find out what a mix-up life is!"

CHAPTER V

MORE ABOUT A RING

THE next week was very full for Isabel. Caroline and her mother were starting for Kentucky on Thursday night; and there was much planning and sewing and packing to be done, in all of which Isabel was called upon for companionship and advice. The other girls, either from embarrassment or scorn, kept away, and Caroline clung miserably to Isabel, who forgot her own injuries in her friend's grief and contrition. Even Molly Ramsay shrank from going to the Harpers'.

"I just can't, my dear," she said. "Caroline knows that I think she has behaved in a perfectly inexcusable way; she'd think me a hypocrite if I went there, and I should feel like one myself. I honestly do not see how you can go."

"Well, I feel so terribly sorry for Caro that I can't condemn her very much. She's failed in her studies; and she's ashamed to go back to school and face all the boys and girls after the things she told that weren't true. It seems dreadful for us all to turn against her. And anyway, it's only a week or two since we were ready enough to accept her hospitality, you know, Molly."

"But we wouldn't have done so if we had known what was coming, I'm sure. It's awfully sweet of you, Golden-Hair, but I couldn't be as forgiving as you are."

"Oh, yes, you could. It's because I'm so sorry for her; and if you think hard enough, I'm certain that you'll feel just the same."

"I'll try, but I know it's of no use," said Molly, who had snatched a minute at Isabel's desk before school called in the morning. "How did you translate that hard passage on page 54 — the one beginning *Morgen früh?* I couldn't make anything out of it." And so Caroline and her troubles dropped from the conversation.

On Thursday evening Isabel stayed at the Harpers' for dinner, and went to the station with Mrs. Harper and Caroline and Ellery. Just before the train started, Molly Ramsay and Eric Thomas hurried breathlessly up the platform, Eric with a box of candy, and Molly with an American Beauty rose twisted up in tissue-paper. Mrs. Harper was already on the train, and Caroline was about to mount the steps.

"I came to say good-bye," gasped Molly, kissing Caroline and thrusting the rose into her hand. "I'm sorry I'm late. Oh, good-bye, Caro. I hope you'll have a good trip."

Caroline could only stammer her thanks and joy.

"Good luck to you!" said Eric, giving her the box of candy and helping her up the steps.

As the train began to move, and the little group

on the platform turned away, Isabel whispered, "There! What did I tell you, Molly? You couldn't help being sorry, either, could you?"

"I think it was you and Eric that made me change my mind," responded Molly. "I was ashamed to let both of you outdo me in kindness."

Isabel and Ellery Harper walked back up town together. "What a mess Caroline has made of things!" said Ellery, sighing.

"It's too bad," answered Isabel; and she thought to herself, "How happy I am in spite of all my little ups and downs. When you see other people's troubles, your own don't seem so trying, somehow or other."

All the week she was studying for the semester examinations — working, it seemed to her, day and night. And just in the midst of things Grandfather Stuart, who owned a large stock-farm at Dalton, thirty miles away, came in for a day or two. Isabel loved her grandfather, and gave him every moment that she could out of her "jam-full and running-over" days.

It was now more than two weeks since she began to plan for her chrysoprase ring. Her allowance had come in, and bit by bit she was dropping such sums as she could spare into the copper-lustre pitcher that had been Aunt Alice's. Several times when she had errands to do, she walked instead of paying car-fare; and hurriedly, for every minute was precious; she mended all her stockings, even some that seemed beyond repair — so that she would not have to buy

new ones for a month or two; she cleaned her best white kid gloves herself, instead of sending them to the cleaner; and she bought cheaper note-paper than she liked to use. In a dozen small ways, she saved a few pennies or a dime, or fifty cents, and with a kind of impatient happiness dribbled the coins into the pitcher, thinking of the chrysoprase raindrops waiting at Miss Titus's to be transferred to a girlish finger.

"Saving is such hard work!" she groaned; "but I positively cannot live without the ring!" She did not say much about it to any one, though, for she had a superstitious fear that if she talked about it, she would never get it.

When Grandpa Stuart was going away, he slipped a silver dollar into Isabel's hand, as she held his overcoat for him. "Buy yourself a ribbon, Puss," he said, smiling down at her with his dark eyes that were so much younger than his white hair and wrinkled cheeks. Grandpa Stuart seemed to think that girls needed money chiefly to buy neck-ribbons.

"Something better!" laughed Isabel. "Thank you ever so much, grandfather. You're too good to me."

"Nobody could be," answered the old man gallantly, as he said good-bye. Only in his secret heart did he admit that Isabel was his favourite grandchild.

The dollar fell into the copper-lustre pitcher with a triumphant clatter. "What luck!" it seemed to say. "Now you'll surely get the ring!"

But somehow the money seemed to find a way of getting out of the pitcher almost as fast as it went in.

On Friday noon Fanny came upstairs with a disconsolate step. She sat down on Isabel's bed, and stared moodily at the wall.

"What's the matter, Angel Child?" inquired Isabel, who was getting ready to go back to school, and had no time to lose.

"Some of our class want to have a sleighing party to-morrow afternoon," said Fanny. "It's because three of us have birthdays this week and next, and we can celebrate 'em all together."

"That's nice," said Isabel, burrowing in her closet for her heaviest shoes. There was a sinking at her heart.

"Everybody's had a sleighing party but us," Fanny went on; "and we want to have a chaperon, and go out to Pheasant Branch for supper. It'll cost at least a dollar, and perhaps more; and I owed most of my allowance to mother, and she doesn't approve of borrowing, and I can't ask her for any more money this month —"

"Well?" Isabel had emerged from the closet with a red face, and was taking off her tan shoes.

"I can't very well get out of going," added Fanny, "for I'm one of the birthday people, you know." There were tears in her eyes and her lip quivered.

"Why, I can let you have the money," responded the elder sister quickly. "I almost forgot about your birthday, but of course I intended to give you

something. Will this do instead of a present?" She hopped to the shelf, with one shoe off and one shoe on, and taking down the lustre pitcher, put two dollars into Fanny's hand. "Now you won't have to scrimp if anything happens — if you have to pay for music or anything like that."

"Oh, Isabel, how good of you!" Fanny gave a squeal of joy. "Can you really afford it?" She hesitated guiltily, holding out the coins on her palm.

"Dear me, yes," Isabel answered, lacing up her shoes very fast. "My allowance is heaps bigger than yours, because I'm seventeen."

"But aren't you saving for your ring?"

"Oh, that can wait. I sha'n't die for want of it."

Fanny jingled the silver dollar and the four quarters together, as she skipped to the door. "It's peachy of you, Isabel," she said warmly; "but you're the best sister in the world, anyway."

Isabel lifted the pitcher, and looked down at the dimes and nickels at the bottom. "Oh, well," she consoled herself, "perhaps I can make it up somehow. I sha'n't ever ride in the street-car, and it won't hurt me to miss seeing the Ben Greet Players —" She hurried off to school, calculating how much she could save in the next fortnight.

A few days afterward she found seventy-five cents under the edge of her plate at dinner, and glanced over at her mother with a grateful smile.

"We're having a poor man's dinner to-night," said Mrs. Carleton, as she served the stew and boiled

rice; "but nobody must complain, for it's in a good cause. There's no dessert except some apples that grandmother sent in from the farm."

Isabel squeezed her mother's hand as they were getting up from the table. "It's dear of you," she whispered, "but you mustn't do it again. I don't want the family to starve in order that I may be weighted down with jewels!"

Examination week saw a considerable addition to her hoard. She was too busy and too tired to go anywhere, and she rigidly denied herself all luxuries. But then, Rodney Fox brought her a pound box of bitter-sweets, "to help out on the exams," and she was not very much of a martyr after all.

Then something very dreadful happened. Mrs. Hogan's little daughter Nora died suddenly of heart-disease. Mrs. Hogan was the Carletons' washer-woman. Nora had always been ailing, but her death was, of course, a shock to her family. Isabel, going to the Hogans' door to leave a parcel of things that her mother had sent, caught a glimpse of some red geraniums and a wreath of paper roses in the dark-ened room beyond. Hurrying home, she slipped up to her room, emptied a handful of money out of the pitcher, and caught the next car down town. She bought a mass of short-stemmed pink and white roses and had them sent to the Hogans' address.

"I just couldn't bear *not* to," she told her mother afterward. "She was only seven, you know — just as old as Celia — and not to have any flowers —"

"It was quite right of you, my dear," said Mrs.

Carleton; but she did not dare to ask about the ring.

On Sunday morning, Isabel had started for church with Fanny, and had come back because she had forgotten her prayer-book. While she was in her room, she heard her father and mother talking in the hall.

"Poor child," said Mrs. Carleton, "she doesn't say anything, but I know it troubles her not to be able to get the ring that she's set her heart upon."

"Why, I thought she was going to buy it from her allowance," answered Professor Carleton's even voice. "Hasn't she got it yet?"

"No, not yet." Mrs. Carleton sighed. "Such things don't mean anything to me now, but I remember that when I was a girl, pretty things were as much of a passion with me as they are with Isabel. I thought my life was blighted when I couldn't have them."

"Well, perhaps," said Professor Carleton in a pained tone —"perhaps if I had gone into a more money-making profession, it would have been better for us all. I don't want you and the girls to be unhappy. If I had stuck to law, I could probably have provided better for my family and given them more enjoyments and opportunities. But you know, Laura, when I gave up law, I didn't dream that I was going to have you and the girls a few years later."

"You didn't know what you were coming to, did you, dear?" said Mrs. Carleton, with tender raillery. "Well, don't you worry, Arthur. There isn't a

happier family anywhere than we are. The material things don't count, when we have each other, and love each other —" Her voice broke a little.

Professor Carleton answered softly, "You're the one that makes everything beautiful for us all. If I don't make money, Laura, I have found a jewel of a wife. Her price is far above rubies."

"Or chrysoprases," added Isabel, as she heard her father and mother go downstairs. "What's a ring?" She snatched her prayer-book and handkerchief, and dashed through the house and out at the side door, to catch up with Fanny.

The next day Eric Thomas came up behind Isabel in the hall, at school. "Do you know what's hanging over you, Isabel?" he said.

Isabel looked up at the ceiling in quick alarm.

"I'm speaking figuratively," laughed Eric. "You needn't look so scared."

"Ugh, I thought perhaps it was a spider!" Isabel began to laugh, too. "What do you mean, Eric?"

"The class is going to make up to you for that blooming mess about the votes for president. You're going to have the valedictory."

"Oh, Eric!" cried Isabel. "I don't believe I deserve it. There are plenty of others whose standings are as high as mine. Your own are, you know."

"Well, the class votes on the five highest; and Mr. Stacy told me to-day that he was going to ask for the vote, by ballot, to-morrow."

"I've had enough of this voting business," said

Isabel, with a twinge of remembrance. The episode of the class election had not entirely ceased to hurt.

"Piffle!" replied Eric good-naturedly. "That other affair isn't worth remembering. Now, you lie low and keep cool. I'm going to engineer this little tea-party — if you will permit me to mix my metaphors — and it'll come out all right."

"But, Eric," protested Isabel, "you ought to have the valedictory yourself. I don't see any reason why I should take it away from you."

"Don't get fussed till it happens," Eric replied. "There's the bell — I must beat it. Good-bye, Lady Val. You'll be *It.*"

And so she was. When the ballot was taken, after school on Tuesday, the five who had the highest standings were Isabel Carleton, Amy Ellsworth, Eric Thomas, Lois Tucker, and Rudolph Salzman.

The votes were two to one in favour of Isabel.

"Hooray!" spouted Eric, shaking both her hands, after the meeting. "Didn't I tell you so?"

"I'm sorry it wasn't you," said Isabel.

"And I'm glad it was you," answered the generous boy. After the terrible thing that happened the next fall, Isabel always thought of Eric as he looked that day with unselfish kindness lighting up his face.

"You deserved it," persisted Isabel. "I don't half so much, do I, Molly?"

"I was so afraid something would happen to spoil it," exulted Molly, with one hand on Isabel's

shoulder and the other busily passing about a paper bag of Jordan almonds.

Rodney Fox was in for dinner that night, and he seemed even more pleased than the family, when he heard the news. "Good for you, Isabel!" he said, beaming with satisfaction. "Here's to you—" He waved his glass of water. "A toast to the valedictorian. Speech! speech!"

Blushing and confused, Isabel sat crumbling her bread. "Do stop, Rod," she begged. "You'll see how horribly I'll do when the time comes. I shall be tongue-tied, I'm sure."

"Oh, a woman can always find something to say," Rodney replied. "No danger of your lacking for words."

"Is that what you think of us, now that you've got into college?" asked Mrs. Carleton quizzically.

Rodney coloured a bit. "Well, of course I mean girls," he said rather lamely. "They do gabble so! I often wonder why they can't keep still for a few seconds at a time."

"So do I, Rodney," smiled Professor Carleton, nodding at Isabel, who made a face at him in return. "But there's one woman, anyway, whose voice we should all like to hear," he went on; "and that's Madame Felisini. I notice in to-night's paper that she's going to give a concert here — almost impromptu, you might say — next Tuesday evening, on her way from Chicago to Minneapolis."

"Oh, is she?" said Mrs. Carleton eagerly. And

then she checked herself, adding more slowly, "I've always wanted to hear her. She's really wonderful, of course. And it's so seldom that we have an opportunity to hear a great singer here —"

"You and father ought to go," said Isabel, laying down her fork. "You shouldn't miss it."

"I don't believe we had better try," said Mrs. Carleton, looking over at her husband. And then she said briskly, "Do give Rodney another slice of the beef-loaf, Arthur, and some of the potato. And, Celia, won't you drink another glass of milk if I ask Olga to bring it?"

The conversation changed, and Madame Felisini was not mentioned again; but after Rodney had gone, Isabel went into the sitting-room where Mrs. Carleton was mending a table-cloth that had been torn by an icy clothes-line. "Now, mother," said the girl, "you and father positively must go to hear Madame Felisini next Tuesday. You've always wanted to hear her and you've never had the chance. If we girls didn't take every cent that father can earn, you could go to Chicago sometimes for the opera. But anyway, you've just got to go to this concert, mother."

Mrs. Carleton did not look up from her sewing. "I'd like to, dear," she said wistfully, "but I really can't. The tickets are two dollars and a half apiece — I looked in the paper — and we can't afford that much. Your father starts the next day for the meeting of the C.A., and he has to have a new hat, and

new gloves, and ever so many things. No, let's not talk any more about the Madame. She'll have to sing her little songs without me."

"Well, I won't *say* any more," answered Isabel, patting the busy fingers that were plying the needle, "but that won't prevent my doing all the thinking I choose."

Mrs. Carleton looked up and smiled absently. "Think all you want to, Little One," she said, "but don't worry about me. And won't you go and help Fanny with her composition? It seems that she has to write something about *Immigrants,* and she doesn't know how to begin."

"Dear me," said Isabel, turning away, "I'm sure I don't know much about them, either, but I'll do the best I can to help her." She went out, frowning thoughtfully. She was not thinking about immigrants, but something much nearer home.

On Tuesday afternoon, shortly after Isabel had come in, Mrs. Carleton found a bunch of violets on her dresser; tucked among the flowers was an envelope containing two tickets for the concert — which was really the event of the season in Jefferson.

"Oh, my blessed child, you shouldn't have done this!" she cried, running into Isabel's room, where the girl was curled up on the bed reading *The Mill on the Floss.* "You ought not to have spent the money that you have been saving for weeks."

Isabel laid down her book. "I did it because it made me happy to do it, mother," she said, "and it will break my heart if you and father don't go.

You've always wanted to hear Madame Felisini, and now you shall hear her."

"But —" began Mrs. Carleton, fingering the envelope, "but, Isabel —"

"Not a word," cried Isabel, springing up, and putting her hand across her mother's lips. "You're going, and you'll look like the Queen in her Garden, wearing your white voile and the violets."

And of course mother went, looking like the Queen in her Garden, and radiant with a joy that was not all on Madame Felisini's account.

The next morning, after she had seen her father off on a half-past-eight train, Isabel slipped into Miss Titus's shop, on her way to school. "I can't buy the ring, Miss Titus," she said cheerfully, though there was a catch in her voice. "The pennies just won't stay in my fingers long enough."

"Oh, it's too bad," said Miss Titus, who had not got over being a girl herself, and loved pretty things as much as Isabel. "Why don't you go on trying for another month or two?"

"No," Isabel replied, biting her lip to keep it from quivering. "If it isn't one thing, it's another. There's always something that I just *have* to do with my money. I've given up the ring. Probably I don't deserve it. I'm sorry that I made you lay it aside for so long," she added contritely.

"It doesn't make any difference," said Miss Titus, taking two dollars out of the till and handing them to Isabel. "A lady was in yesterday inquiring for a ring like that, and she will take it if I send her

word. But I'm really unhappy that you're not going to have it, for you like it so much."

"Yes, I do," said Isabel, trying to smile, "but I guess it's not for me. I must hurry, or I'll be late for school." She hastened out, winking back two very insistent tears.

Four days later, she found her father before the fire when she came home from a tea at Molly Ramsay's. His handsome scholarly head was bent over a book, as usual, and he looked as if he had never been away. Isabel ran to him and kissed him, and he held her fingers in his warm firm hand.

"I'm sorry I couldn't be here when you came, father," she said, unfastening her squirrel collar, "but Molly wanted me to pour, and her cousin was there from Winona —"

"It's all right, Pussy," returned the professor. "Your mother and I were getting acquainted with each other again."

"Saying nothing," put in Mrs. Carleton from the button-holes that she was making in Celia's pinafore.

"That's one way," laughed Professor Carleton. "And here, little girl," he said, reaching into his coat pocket, "here's something that I got for you while I was away." He put into her hand a box, tiny and square, and tied up in white tissue paper.

Isabel gasped under her breath, "The ring!" but she did not open the box at once. She dreaded to, just a trifle; father was so dear and queer and forgetful that one never knew what he was going to do.

"Holden insisted on my staying at his house, and

I didn't have any hotel bills," said father, half-apologetically, reaching for his book. " I was passing a shop where there were hand-made rings for sale "— he began to hunt for his place —" and I went in. I thought I had heard you say something about wanting a ring —" Isabel was slowly tearing off the outer layer of paper from the box. " The woman asked me what colour my daughter wore the most," Professor Carleton went on, adjusting his glasses, " and I told her it was either blue or red, I couldn't remember which." Isabel glanced sadly at her mother across her father's book. " The woman laughed," continued father, finding his place at last, " and said there were two things always suitable for young girls, and that she had them both in one ring." He paused, for he had begun to read. " And so I got — coral and Japanese pearls."

He was halfway down the page, and Isabel opened the box. Her mother was watching her in concealed dismay, but the girl gave a cry of pleasure, and put her arms around her father's neck.

" It *was* coral that you wanted, wasn't it? " he inquired anxiously, with his finger in his book, as he looked at her over his glasses.

" Yes, yes, father, and the ring is lovely," said Isabel, setting the silver circle on her finger. " How things do come to him who will but wait."

Mrs. Carleton took up her button-holes with a relieved sigh.

Isabel sat a long time twisting the band of pink and white and silver, and looking at it with happy

eyes. "Father," she said mischievously at last, "were any of the foundations of the New Jerusalem made of coral?"

"Of course not, child," murmured her father without looking up. "What has that to do with it?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Isabel gaily, smiling over at her mother; "but I do love my ring, father, even if "— in a lower tone —"it isn't the New Jerusalem kind."

CHAPTER VI

A TALK WITH FATHER

"MAY I come in?" asked Isabel, tapping at the door of her father's study, one evening in the latter part of February.

"Yes, yes! Surely," called Professor Carleton, laying down his fountain pen as the door opened. He sat at his desk, with books all about him, on chairs and on the floor. The room was in shadow, except for the green-shaded light over the desk, but the white busts of Dante and Goethe glimmered from the tops of the book-cases. Mrs. Carleton, though she loved order, never interfered with the arrangement — or the lack of it — in her husband's study. "I think a man ought to have one room," she used to say, "where he can keep things just as he chooses, and revel in chaos if he likes."

Isabel stood poised on the threshold, looking doubtfully at her father. "Are you sure I'm not wrecking your train of thought?" she queried.

"Not in the least," said the professor, with his finger still between the leaves of his Greek dictionary. "What is it? Something vexing?" He held out his free hand to the girl, who came and took it, and then settled herself on the arm of his chair.

"No, nothing in particular, father," answered Isabel, "but I was studying away, and I felt *homesick* to see you. We're all so busy, you know, and you are away so much at classes and committee meetings — and now that you're writing your book, it seems as if I don't see much of you —"

"I'm glad you came," said father, squeezing her hand. "I've been thinking about you a good deal lately, in my going and coming, and between the classes and committee meetings."

"About me, popsey? Why, what have I been doing?"

"Well, you've been growing, for one thing, and getting older every minute. I've really noticed once or twice that you aren't a little girl any more."

"Of course not, silly professor. I've had my hair up for nearly a year. Probably you've never observed that it wasn't down my back in two tails, as it used to be."

"I wasn't thinking about hair — at least not altogether." Professor Carleton laid his dictionary aside, and put the cap on his fountain pen. "But I think about you every time I see the college girls going back and forth, or straying into my classes."

"Why, father?"

"I see so many things that I shrink from having you copy."

"Dear me! What, for instance?"

"I don't know how to say it, exactly. I know so little about women's dress that I'm not much of an authority; but thin blouses, and low necks, and silk

stockings and slippers in this cold weather seem to me very much out of place. And some of the girls appear to wear such extremes — huge bows, and hats cocked up in queer shapes, and coloured hose, and strange and wonderful neckwear, and shoes — Heaven preserve us, what shoes!"

"Why, they're just trying to be stylish," protested Isabel, patting her father on the shoulder. "Probably when you were in college, you thought the girls that did that sort of thing were perfect 'queens,' as the boys say now."

"I'm sure I never did, in my wildest moments. Can you imagine your mother dressing like that?"

Isabel giggled, and then straightened her face. "Why, no, of course not; but then, you know, father, I didn't know mother when she was in college — and you didn't, either, as a matter of fact."

"Well, I'm certain that wherever she was, she was always dressed in good taste. And I want my daughter to dress in good taste, too, with a dark gown, and a white collar, and her hair — Do you know anything more beautiful than that?" He took up from the table an engraving of the head of a Greek woman in marble. The hair was waved over the forehead, and coiled softly on the neck. The face was regular and noble in its beauty.

Isabel took the picture in her hand, and looked at it a long time. "It's lovely, father," she sighed, "it's certainly lovely. But you know we don't all look like Greek goddesses, strange as it may seem. Perhaps"— she pinched the professor's ear ro-

guishly, "it's because we haven't Greek gods for fathers."

"You have the best of me there," said Professor Carleton, laughing and putting the picture back on his desk; "but I don't think any young girl would look the worse for having her hair done in that way."

"Probably not," Isabel conceded. "It *is* ever so much prettier than the queer knobs and puffs that some of the girls wear. Why, at Molly's tea the other day, there was a sorority girl telling about how her roommate wore her false curls to class — not her own, you know, but the other girl's, and when the other girl (the one that was telling it) got up, she couldn't find her curls, and she had to go to class without them; and right at the door of 'Sunny' Dyer's class she met her roommate with the curls on, looking as pleased as Punch; and the girl that the curls belonged to was mad for a minute, but then they both burst out laughing, and they giggled all through class, and Professor Dyer kept making sarcastic remarks about girls that only came to college to have a good time —"

"My dear, your pronouns are terribly mixed — as much mixed as the curls, I should say. And really, the young woman who was wearing the curls must have looked exceedingly strange, if her hair were of a different colour —"

"But, goosey, she wouldn't have worn the curls if they had been a different colour from her own hair! She wouldn't be as silly as *that.*"

"Somehow, I am never surprised at any sort of

silliness," sighed the professor. "But what was I saying? Oh, yes! And some of the girls paint their faces, too."

"Oh, not paint — it's only Celia that does that. The girls just powder their faces a little — to take the shine off."

"Powder a little! I sometimes think they've spilled the powder box on their noses. Young girls don't need any cosmetics. It's painting the lily when they use things of that sort."

"More poppy than lily, in some cases," laughed Isabel. "But I admit that some girls do go a little too far."

"Indeed they do. And they scream and giggle in the halls — and they *chew gum!*" His tone made Isabel jump.

"Gracious, father! how you scared me! Honestly, I don't think there are very many who do that."

Professor Carleton turned about in his chair and looked up at his daughter, his grey eyes flashing through his glasses. "Isabel," he said, "if I ever know of your chewing gum in public —"

Isabel put her finger on his lips, and shook his shoulders reprovingly. "Hush, father," she said; "what do you suppose I have a mother for? She's told me all about those things."

The professor settled back in his chair. "Well, when I see those girls," he apologised, "I wonder who their fathers and mothers are; and then I wonder whether perhaps your mother and I have failed

in some respect." He sighed. "I want you to be the best possible sort of woman, my dear."

"I'll try to be, father," said Isabel softly.

She sat silently, smoothing her father's hair, which was growing grey at the temples and thin at the back. After a while he said ruefully, "You won't come in to see me again, if I scold and harangue like this."

"Oh, yes, I will. I love you even when you are cross." They were silent again for a while. "You know I'm finishing the high school this year," said Isabel at last. "Graduation is a sort of beginning of things, isn't it? Life gets a lot more complicated after that. But goodness knows it seems complicated enough, even in the high school."

"Well, living is not a simple business, no matter where it's done," said the professor, holding his daughter's hand very close. "But you'll surely make something good out of it, my dear."

"I'd be pretty ungrateful to you and mother if I didn't," replied Isabel soberly.

"We've always hoped we could send you abroad for a year between high school and college," Professor Carleton went on. "I want you to learn French well, and get a little German or Italian, and gather some ideas about art, and some general culture, you know. Now is the time for you to acquire those things — they come so much harder when you try to get them later. But we can't afford to send you abroad now. Things seem to cost so much.

Your mother is a Titaness at managing, but she can't evolve something out of nothing."

"Well, don't think of it, father," said Isabel. "If I can't go, I can't. I'm sure I shall be happy enough right here in Jefferson. Of course, I'd love to see the beautiful clothes and laces in Paris, and the black-eyed beggar children in Rome, and the big London 'Bobbies'; and of course I *do* want to learn French well, but what's the use of fussing about the impossible?"

"We won't, then," said Professor Carleton. "You'll get a good deal out of your first college year — and perhaps we can afford to have a tutor come in during the summer to give you a really good start in your French conversation."

"That would be fine, father. But now let's talk about something else. What am I going to do in life?"

"Do, Isabel?" The professor set his glasses straight and looked up at the girl on the arm of his chair.

"Yes. What is my business going to be?"

"Business! Bless me! Must you have a business?"

"Well, I don't mean selling real estate or canning peas. But I want to earn my own living as soon as I'm able to. You and mother have enough to look after, and you ought to save something — more than you do, anyway."

"You want to earn your own living, eh?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"But do you have to think about that now?"

"I think I ought to be planning."

"But perhaps you will marry. I hope — yes, I may say I really hope — that you will."

"Perhaps nobody will want me; and perhaps I shan't find anybody that I want. There are plenty of women that aren't married."

"Yes, yes, and some very fine women, too. But all the same, I hope you will marry and have a home and children of your own."

"Even so, I can't assume that I'm going to."

"I don't see why not."

"I do. But listen, father: I think I'd like to go on the stage."

"Dear me! On the stage! Oh, but, really, Isabel —" Father looked bewildered.

"Or else I'd like to write novels. When I see you writing away at your book, I'm so proud of you! And it makes me wild to write, too."

"But my book isn't a novel." Professor Carleton was almost shocked.

"N-no; but I almost wish it were, popsy. Well, anyway, I want to do something great."

"So do we all, I'm afraid, Puss. Nobody is content to be obscure."

"It must be lovely to be famous — to have reporters coming to interview you about your favourite colour, and what you think of suffrage, and whether Dickens was a humourist or not; and then to have the

papers print what you eat for breakfast, and how many automobiles you own, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't believe that's quite all there is to the novel-writing business. I suspect that one has to do more than interview reporters, and tell what one eats for breakfast."

"Oh, well, I suppose so; but it must be easy just to sit down and write about the people you see. Everybody's so interesting, you know, and everybody's a little queer."

"I hope you'll find it easy," said Professor Carleton with a sigh, as he looked at the scratched and scored and much-corrected manuscript in front of him. "Most people don't. I advise you to think a long time before you make writing your business. You may have to come back and be supported by poor old father, after all!"

Isabel laughed, and rumpled the staid professor's hair till he looked very odd and dashing. "Old wet-blanket!" she cried. "You'll repent 'them crool words' when you see me bringing out a novel that sells a million a year."

"I certainly shall," answered the professor. "But I think that will be quite a while yet."

"Perhaps — a year or two," responded Isabel demurely. "And I may have to teach for a while, in between, to keep the wolf away. But now read me the *Færie Queene,* father, before I go and leave you in peace."

Professor Carleton, smoothing his rumpled hair with both hands, said resignedly, "Get me the book, then, Plague-o'-my-Life."

Isabel brought the book, and settled herself on a foot-stool, while her father opened the book at the passage about Britomart, the warlike maid. He read the long rolling stanzas in a ringing voice that held his young listener absorbed through half a dozen pages. Her hands were tightly clasped and her eyes wide with emotion when he laid down the book.

"How insignificant one feels," she said, "with his little fountain pen and his little pad of paper and his silly little ideas, when he reads the work of a great poet like that! It seems hardly worth while for an ordinary person to try to write at all, does it?"

"No, it doesn't. But then, each one must fill his place in the world as best he can."

"Not in bed yet, Lady-bird?" said Mrs. Carleton's voice at the door.

"I'm just going, mother," answered Isabel rising with a yawn. "I didn't realise how sleepy I was. And I've worn poor Fazzy to a frazzle."

Mrs. Carleton came in, wearing a trailing blue dressing-gown, and looking very young and attractive with a bright colour in her cheeks, and her hair in a braid down her back. "Discussing the affairs of the universe, I suppose?" she said blithely. "Run along now, and get your beauty-sleep."

"She looks as if she'd had hers, doesn't she, father?" cried Isabel, kissing her mother's cheek.

"Now I'm going to bed and dream about all the wise things father has said to me, and all the foolish ones I've said to him. And oh! how glad I am that I have just exactly the father and mother that I needed the most, and not anybody else's!"

"Many thanks for the compliment," said Professor Carleton, taking up his pen. And after Isabel had gone, he and Mrs. Carleton sat a long time looking at each other and smiling and saying nothing.

CHAPTER VII

THE FRAT INFORMAL

ONE afternoon Mrs. Carleton was coming out of the Public Library when she met Rodney Fox coming in. He stopped in the doorway, with lifted hat, his eyes glowing. "Oh, Mrs. Carleton," he said, "I was going to telephone you. I want to ask you a favour."

"What is it, Rodney?" asked the lady, smiling into the boy's frank eyes.

"Won't you let Isabel go to our next frat informal? It's coming in two weeks." Rodney's face was very eager.

"Why-y, I hardly know what to say —"

"She hasn't been at one of our stunts this year, you know," the boy went on. "It hasn't been because I haven't asked her —"

"I know; you've been very kind to think of her."

The boy's face took on a queer look, as if he were saying to himself, "*Kind* to think of her! Jiminy crickets!"

"But you know how her father and I feel," Mrs. Carleton continued. "We want to keep her from getting grown-up before her time, and we think the fraternity houses are too — well, too sophisticated

for her. We want her to be just a nice, simple high-school girl this year, and not try to be young-lady-fied and frivolous."

Rodney nodded gravely. "I know what you mean," he said; "and of course I know you're right. I don't want her to be sophisticated and frivolous, either. But it won't hurt her to come just this once, will it? You know, our men are very well behaved"— he laughed —"and of course we have plenty of chaperons."

"It isn't that. But I don't like to take the edge off her college life by giving her college pleasures too early."

"But won't just a taste of them help her to understand college life better when she gets to it?"

"Perhaps so."

"And you know, Mrs. Carleton," Rodney said, speaking very rapidly, "it's hard for me, too. There isn't any other girl that I want to ask, and the fellows don't like to have us go stag — without a girl, I mean. I wish Isabel could go once in a while."

Mrs. Carleton smiled thoughtfully. "I think she might — once." Rodney's face brightened. "When is this next informal, did you say?"

"Two weeks from to-day — Friday. Shall I telephone Isabel that you say she may go?"

"Yes, if you like," said Mrs. Carleton, tucking her books more closely under her arm.

"Thank you, more than I can say!" Rodney stood and watched her as she went down the steps

and across the street. He was smiling happily to himself.

When Mrs. Carleton came home, after her errands were done, Isabel was waiting at the sitting-room window. She opened the door, and took her mother, books and parcels and all, into a wild embrace, whirling her about in an ecstatic dance. "Oh, Mummy-Carl," she cried, "Rodney telephoned me. Oh, I'm so glad! I've always wanted *so* much to go."

"I'm happy to have you go, this once. It's two weeks to wait, you know, child."

"What an eternity! But m-m-mh — I'm going — to the — fraternity — dance!" She whirled her mother about the hall again.

Fanny came to the hall-door from the sitting-room. "Why, Isabel, you're rumpling mother all up!" she called impatiently. "See! her hat's all on one side, and she looks like a lunatic. Poor muzzy!" She rubbed her head against her mother's sleeve. "What's Isabel making such a fuss about, anyway? She's always so excited over every little thing."

"Something too lovely to tell," said Isabel. "Let's keep it a secret a while, mother, because it's such fun."

"I don't believe you can keep it very long," commented Fanny shrewdly; "you'll just *have* to let it out in an hour or two. Come on upstairs and see those new pictures of you and Molly that I took the other day. I've just had them developed."

They were two very long weeks that followed. Celia caught cold, and spent a fretful day on the sofa; the Century Club met at the Carletons', and were duly fed and sped; father went out of town to give a lecture, and came back safely; mother and father were invited out for dinner twice, and they entertained the Lenners and the Mitchells for dinner; Isabel went to a church supper, and to the moving-picture theatre with Rodney, and to a Senior tea at Lois Tucker's, and to an illustrated lecture on Spanish Art, at the University, and was invited to Amy Ellsworth's for dinner, and to Fräulein Ewald's for lunch. And then of course there was plenty of school and studying. It was a very gay and busy fortnight, but it dragged a little in spite of everything. Toward the end of it, Grandmother Stuart came in from Dalton to stay for a few days. She was brisk and lively, with very white hair and very keen brown eyes that were sharp and kindly at the same time.

Isabel often said, "Grandmother is so *understanding* that you can tell her anything, and she never thinks you're a nuisance, no matter how much you bother."

Of course Isabel had to relate to Grandmother all the events that had taken place since the family gathering at Christmas. And of course the "frat informal" was not long in creeping into the conversation.

Isabel was to wear her best embroidered muslin to the dance. "White is the only thing so young a

girl should wear to such a party," her mother had said decidedly.

"I ought to have a new sash," said Isabel, "but maybe I can make the old one do. I'll press it very nicely, and perk up the bow a little."

Grandmother was sitting reading, with her spectacles very far down on her nose. "Did you say something about a sash, Isabel?" she asked.

"Yes, grandma, I was saying that I needed a new one for the fraternity party. My old green one looks pretty shabby, but I think I can spruce it up."

"If you had a new one, what colour would you get?"

"Why, I think I'd get pink this time — just a lovely coral colour, like my ring." Isabel held up the pearl and coral ring that had come after so many trials and disappointments.

Grandma looked thoughtful. "I think a nice fresh sash would be very desirable, little girl," she said, as she fingered the ribbon that had grown a trifle limp and creased. "This one will do for second best, but you want to look very spick and span for this party. Now you go down and get just the kind that you want, and I'll pay for it."

"Oh, how lovely! I was wishing and wishing that I might have one, but I couldn't afford it, and I hated to ask mother."

"Get a very, very nice one, and if you would rather, have it made up at the store, so that it will be very perky and fetching."

"I'll go right down this minute!" cried Isabel

joyfully. "The stores don't close till half-past six. Oh, I'm so happy!" And she danced away, after giving grandmother a hasty hug.

Just at dinner-time she came back, with the sash done up in white tissue paper. She took it out with careful fingers, and held it up — a dainty and very "Frenchy" arrangement of ribbon, in the delicate pink of the pink coral, between rose and salmon. "Isn't it too exquisite, grandma?" said Isabel, beaming. Her grey eyes were alight with pleasure.

"Come up to my room," said grandmother mysteriously. "I have something up there that may interest you."

Upstairs in her room, she took a leather case out of the top drawer of the bureau. "I usually bring this along, you know," she said, "because your grandfather is so careless about leaving everything open when I'm gone."

She opened the case, which was full of folded tissue papers, and out of the bottom she drew another paper. Isabel bent over it with breathless suspense. Unfolded, it showed a necklace of carved pink coral, and a beautiful pendant of carved roses set in gold filagree, with a sprinkling of pearls.

The girl gave a suppressed shriek of wonder and delight. "Where did you get it, grammy? It looks awfully quaint and old, and so *refined*."

"This belonged to my mother when she was a girl — you were named after her, and after your Aunt Isabel who died." Grandmother spoke softly. And then she added, "This is really a very lovely

and valuable old piece. I'm going to let you wear it to your party, if you will be careful of it. Would you like to?"

"*Would* I?" Isabel could scarcely speak for happiness. "Oh, grammy, *you* know how I love pretty things. I'm mad over them. You don't think I'm silly to love them, do you?"

"Not in the least, dear. I want you to love them, and to have them, too, whenever you can without being vain or selfish. Now put this on, and see how you like it."

"I adore it," cried Isabel lifting the necklace with caressing fingers, and clasping it around her neck.

"I'll tie it on with a bit of pink ribbon, the night of the party," said grandmother, "so that nothing can happen to it."

"It's the last touch to my good fortune," said Isabel, looking dreamily into the glass, where the pink and gold were shining below a flushed face and a halo of bright hair.

The party itself was like some swift exhilarating vision. After the prolonged task of getting dressed, there came the lurking terror of meeting new people and of trying to do the correct thing among new conditions. The East Indian boy at the door of the fraternity house seemed like one of the dark servitors in the Arabian Nights, but the maid in the dressing room was more reassuring, with her white cap, her deft hands, and her friendly smile. The young men's rooms, lighted and with open doors down the long halls, showed fascinating glimpses of banners,

pennants, steins, posters, oars, rapiers, photographs, and silver trophies of successes on the track and in the field. Isabel could have stood for hours looking at all these things; but the older sister of one of the men — she must have been fully twenty-five — took her gently by the arm and led her to the top of the stairway, where Rodney was waiting.

The music had begun, and the crowd of girls was beginning to pour down the stairs — girls in delicate pink and blue and corn-coloured gowns, and tulle scarves and satin slippers. Their *coiffures* were high and elaborate, and many of them wore huge bunches of flowers. They were all chattering and laughing, and Isabel was so flustered, as well as so proud and happy, that she scarcely knew what she was doing.

The first waltz, with Rodney, was so easy that she began to get back her self-control. The big folding doors were open between the rooms, and Rodney knew just where all the turns and sharp corners came.

After the waltz, Rodney began to bring up "the fellows"— very fresh-faced young persons, in dark suits (not real "dress-suits," since the occasion was supposed to be informal). Isabel found, too, that most of them were as easy to talk to as Rodney — a little more slangy and a little less serious, perhaps — but very much the same. And she found that "What a splendid house you have!" or "How many men do you have in your fraternity?" was enough to start any one of them off on an enthusiastic account of the building of the new house, and

the admirable qualities of all the fellows. Talking to these strange young men was not half so hard as she had expected, and dancing with them was the simplest thing in the world.

"Ah! here she is!" cried a voice behind her, and she turned, to see Fred Delafield and Evelyn Taylor coming toward her with outstretched hands.

"So lovely to see you again," said Evelyn, whose gentle attractiveness was increased by the lavender chiffon gown that she was wearing. "We've spoken of you a good many times since we saw you out at Middleton, haven't we, Fred?" She took Isabel's left hand and held it, while Delafield gave her right a hearty shake.

"We sure have," he said, in his slow deep voice. "Haven't forgotten your dancing. You're with Rod, aren't you? Can't see why the deuce he hasn't brought you before."

Isabel was shy and confused, but she managed to stammer, "Good reason — my mother never would let me come before."

"She thinks we're a hard lot, does she? Well, we'll have to be so well-behaved to-night that she'll be willing you shall come again."

"You'll be in college next year, won't you?" said Evelyn. "I want the girls in my sorority to know you. It's the Gamma Deltas, you know. Come and have dinner with us next Wednesday night."

"I'd love to," cried Isabel, losing her shyness. "Father says that your sorority is splendid."

"That's where your father shows his good sense,"

put in Delafield. "They're *some* girls, believe me!" He looked down at Evelyn with a kind of protecting pride, and a tender humour that destroyed the flippancy of his slang. "You can't do better than to tie up to them."

Isabel had not thought much about "tying up" to any sorority, though she hoped that she would be asked to join one when she got into college. It gave her a thrill of pleasure to think that perhaps Evelyn was "rushing" her. She could not think of the right thing to say, but Evelyn whispered, "How sweet you look, and what a *darling* necklace!" and just then one of the "fellows" came up to claim her for a dance.

"Save one for me!" called Delafield, as she was whirled away, radiant with excitement and the throb of the music, and the joy that she always felt in dancing.

After that dance was over, Rodney came to her, saying, "I'm going to bring up Sothern — he's a real live professor. He was just asking who you were."

"Goodness!" cried Isabel, in a flutter, "I am sure I shan't be able to think of anything to say to him. Father's kind of professors I'm not afraid of at all, but the fraternity kind —" she shivered in mock apprehension that was not all "put on."

Rodney turned, to present a slender young man with a moustache and eye-glasses. He seemed very young to be a professor, and he was not "father's kind," in the least.

"May I have a dance?" he asked.

"Yes, the third one after this, if you like," answered Isabel, trying to assume an easy air. There were no programmes on this particular evening.

"Delighted. Confusing not having any programmes, isn't it? Are you Professor Carleton's daughter?"

"Yes. Do you know father?"

"Only a little, for I'm in another department; science; chemistry, in fact."

"You must be brave," said Isabel, dashing ahead, determined not to be dull and solemn. "The chemistry people are always blowing things up and burning their eyebrows off."

Sothern looked amused. "I have never burned mine off but once, and then I was laid up for a month. It was in Paris, and a Catholic sister came and took care of me."

"Oh, you've been in Paris!"

"Yes, for two years."

"Wasn't it *wonderful?*"

Sothern smiled at her enthusiasm. "Well, yes, it was all right," he said, "but I got hungry for some old-fashioned American cooking, and I never could see any sense in their talking so much with their hands."

"Oh, but the galleries, and the shops, and the pretty clothes!"

"Well, I went to the galleries on rainy Sundays when I couldn't think of anything else to do; and I didn't have any money to spend in the shops; and

naturally I couldn't wear the pretty clothes, even if I'd known them when I saw them."

Isabel laughed. "I'm mad over Paris," she said, flushing. "It seems as if I can't live till I get there. I'm ashamed to confess it — I'm supposed to want to learn French — but I think it's the clothes that I'm craziest about."

"You'd certainly do credit to the clothes," said the man bluntly, and Isabel felt herself growing red; she was not used to compliments, and she had an uncomfortable feeling that she had invited this one. "You can wear all the clear colours wonderfully," he added, in an off-hand tone. "You'll let me tell you what a delightful colour you have in your sash and in the corals. There's only one thing that I care about that borders on the artistic, and that's colour — I think I learned it in the laboratory. That pink is perfect for you; and there's another that would be, too — a fresh clear green; do you know the colour of chrysoprase?"

"Oh, don't I?" cried Isabel, glad to get the conversation away from personalities. "I almost had a chrysoprase ring once." She launched merrily into the story of the ring, concealing the nervousness that she felt at feeling the man's eyes fixed upon her in open admiration. She had a sense of being very young and foolish and self-conscious, and she was glad when Fred Delafield came up for his dance.

She had happy moments snatched here and there in conversation with Evelyn Taylor, and with some of the girls from her sorority — bright, laughing

creatures, with an undercurrent of seriousness and kindliness in their natures. One, a dreamy-looking damsel, named Iola Fleming, Isabel fell quite in love with, and hung about adoringly whenever she had a chance.

"Evelyn tells me you're coming to our house for dinner," said Iola with a smile. "You must slip away to my room before you go home, on Wednesday, and let me read some poetry to you. I *hope* you love poetry."

"Oh, I do," said Isabel eagerly. She would have said that she loved Sanskrit or anthropology, if Iola had suggested either of them.

"Maybe I'll read you some of my own, then," responded Iola mysteriously. "But I never show it to anyone that I'm not *sure* of."

"You may be sure of me," answered Isabel, wondering vaguely just what it was that Iola wanted to be "sure" about.

"Yes, I think I may," murmured the poetess, with a long look into Isabel's eyes. And then she surrendered herself to a tall "temperamental" appearing youth with long "molasses-candy-coloured" hair, as Isabel termed it; she herself, floating off on Rodney's arm, was beginning to wonder whether they were going to have anything substantial for supper, or only ice-cream.

It turned out to be chicken salad, and sandwiches, and coffee, with ice-cream and cake at the last.

She ate supper with Rodney and Fred Delafield and Evelyn Taylor, and found herself talking and

laughing with them as gaily as she had done at the hotel-table at Middleton.

"It seems somehow as if we had always been friends, doesn't it?" said Evelyn, eating a sandwich, and looking about at the other three.

"I hope we always shall be," said Isabel simply.

"Nothing to prevent," said Rodney, balancing his coffee-cup on his knees (they were having a "sit-about" supper), "unless some of you joggle me while I'm trying to get away with this coffee. That would part us forever."

"Too bad we're all so confoundedly busy," said Fred, "or we might see more of each other. But then we'll *all* be in college next year, and we'll stick together like burdock-burrs." He smiled lazily at Isabel. "Eh, Rod?" he added, taking a huge bite out of a brown-bread sandwich.

"Betcherlife," said Rodney, finishing his coffee. "Only two more dances before we go home. The last one's with me, Isabel."

"And the next to the last is with me," added Delafield.

"The same one that I have with Evelyn," said Rodney.

They paired off as the music began. Isabel and Delafield circled the rooms almost silently. "I believe you're made of thistle-down," Fred said once, as they glided through the hall. "I shall call you Anna Pavlowa."

"Don't. It would embarrass me horribly," Isabel answered. And then she said impulsively, "You

know, I was frightened to death to come here among all these strange people. I'm not used to that sort of thing, and I was sure I'd feel terribly out of it."

"But you haven't, have you?"

"Oh, no! I've felt wonderfully — beautifully — in it!"

"And you've had a good time at our party?"

"The happiest sort of time. Everybody has been so nice to me."

"I'd punch their heads if they hadn't been."

"Well, their heads are safe."

"You must come again."

"I don't know," said Isabel wistfully. "Mother's very particular, and doesn't let me do everything I want to."

"She's a wise mother," answered Fred soberly. "May I come and see her?"

"Yes, do," said Isabel. "Mother is — well, I can't say it. You'll have to come and see."

"My mother's dead," said Delafield softly.

"Oh!" gasped Isabel, and they said nothing more till the music stopped.

After the last dance, and the good-byes, and the shaking hands with the chaperons, Isabel and Rodney walked home briskly through the fresh March night, with a crust of ice crunching under foot, and the stars thick and sparkling overhead.

"I'm mighty glad you could come," said Rodney.

"I've had the loveliest time of my life," said Isabel. "There hasn't been anything to mar it. No matter how many parties I go to, all the rest of my

life, I shall remember the *perfectness* of this." The necklace, and the compliments, and the new friends, and the gaiety of it all had blended into a happiness that had already become a memory.

"There'll be a lot more like it," answered Rodney. "Think of next year."

"I *am* thinking of it," said Isabel, stopping at the steps of the Carleton home, where a light was burning for her in the hall.

And neither she nor Rodney guessed that they were planning next year as it was not to be.

CHAPTER VIII

ISABEL THE HARDHEARTED

"YES, mother, it is her fault," said Isabel shrilly from the head of the stairs. "She shouldn't have taken it,— and I'll never forgive her — never!"

Then she sat down on the top step, and buried her face in her kimono, with the dragons sprawling over it, and cried.

"Isabel, don't speak in that tone in my house," said Mrs. Carleton sternly. But she went up the stairs and sat down beside the sobbing girl, smoothing the sea-green shoulders and the bright gold hair. "All this trouble over a ring!" she sighed. "It isn't such a terrible tragedy, my dear."

"But it was my ring, and I loved it because it was so pretty, and because father brought it to me from Chicago. I'd had it such a little while! And anyway, she had no right to put it on without my saying that she could."

"But she didn't think you'd care so much — and of course she didn't expect to lose it. She feels badly enough, you may be sure."

"Feeling badly doesn't bring back the ring," murmured Isabel, wiping her eyes.

"We'll all take another look for it, and perhaps it will turn up."

"No, it won't. Fanny looked and looked before she told me she'd lost it, and I've hunted everywhere. It's gone, and I know I'll never see it again." Isabel's weeping broke out afresh.

"Well, then, we'll see what we can do about getting another."

"You know we can't afford it; and anyway, I don't want another. It wouldn't be *that* one."

"Perhaps it would be just like it."

"There isn't another like it. It was hand-made, you know, and the corals and pearls were put in in such an odd way. That was the beauty of it, mother, you know very well. It was because it was *different* that I loved it. No other ring will do."

Mrs. Carleton sighed again, this time with some impatience. "I never knew you to be so unreasonable, Isabel. What has come over you?"

Isabel did not answer, but sat wiping her eyes, and trying to coil up her hair, which had fallen over her shoulders.

Mrs. Carleton, in despair at the unrelenting attitude of her eldest daughter, went to Fanny's room, and peeped in. The room was in the wildest disorder. The rugs were in a pile in the corner, the bed had been pulled apart, and the contents of bureau drawers were scattered on the floor. Fanny's search for the lost ring had stopped at nothing. In the midst of the bed-clothes, a heaving heap, with two solid tan shoes sticking out of it, was all that

could be seen of the culprit. Mrs. Carleton sat down on the bed, and felt among the covers for the girl's hand.

"Fanny, dear, don't worry any more. We'll find it yet, or if we don't we'll try to get Isabel another. You may give some of your allowance toward it, if you want to."

Fanny raised her tousled black head from the hollow where she had burrowed. "She won't be satisfied with another. It's dreadful to have her so — so — unforgiving, mother. I've told her how sorry I am —"

"I know, dear. It isn't like Isabel at all. You know she is usually as kind and generous as can be."

"Yes, she is," quavered Fanny. "She gave me her silk muffler when I lost mine, you remember; and two dollars for the birthday sleigh-ride, and that linen collar that she embroidered, and ever so many things. But that doesn't help much now."

"It ought to help. You must do what you can to set things right, and then wait till she's herself again."

"But she won't speak to me," wailed Fanny. "She acts as if I had done something terrible. Of course, I know I ought not to have worn her ring, but she might forgive me, anyway."

"It's very strange," said Mrs. Carleton, with a worried look coming between her eyes. "But we mustn't say anything to father about all this, for I can't have him bothered while he is writing his book. He won't be at home for dinner to-night — he's

going to the University Club, and I'm very glad he doesn't have to see his daughters in such a state as this."

At dinner, Isabel sat with red eyes and hard lips, eating mechanically and saying nothing. To her mother's cheerful remarks and Celia's chatter she answered the merest monosyllables. Fanny, also red-eyed, but with quivering lips, was struggling to keep herself in hand. There was boiled chicken for dinner, with gravy and biscuits, and spiced peaches, — viands to console almost any misery when one is thirteen.

"Please pass me the biscuits," said Fanny in as natural a tone as she could muster.

Isabel lifted the plate and handed it to Fanny with a distant air, like that which a very proud duchess might assume toward a kitchen-knave. Overpowered by such haughty demeanour, poor Fanny, in a passion of remorse and grief, dropped the plate upon the table, and rushed from the room in a deluge of tears. The plate, breaking into bits, demolished also the one upon which Fanny had received her generous helping, so that a cascade of biscuits, gravy, mashed potato, and peaches bounded and dribbled over the table-cloth and down upon the floor.

Isabel sat without moving while Mrs. Carleton rang for Olga to clear away the mess, and spread a napkin over the signs of the wreck.

"What a house!" groaned the distracted mother, ladling gravy for a very round-eyed Celia. "I'm sure I can never live through another day like this."

She made no further attempts to talk to Isabel, who, without waiting for her dessert, left the table and shut herself in her room.

The next morning was Saturday, a day on which the girls usually did their allotted tasks about the house with the liveliest merriment and peals of laughter. But on this forenoon, each girl swept and dusted her room and made her bed without a word. The silence of the house was nothing short of dismal. When Isabel accidentally met Fanny on the stairs, she passed her sister with unseeing eyes, as if the younger girl were an invisible spirit of whom she had no knowledge.

"I won't be easy and sentimental, and say I forgive her when I don't," Isabel was saying to herself; "I just can't bear losing my ring, and it's of no use to pretend I don't mind. When I have so little, and love nice things so much —" She choked, and dashed into her room, where she spent an hour in straightening her bureau drawers. Some very bitter tears dripped down among the skirts and camisoles, and the collars and vari-coloured ribbons. The girls at school had admired the ring so much, while they exclaimed over its delicate prettiness, that Isabel had more than once been a centre of a friendly but half-envious group who passed the bit of craftsmanship about and examined it in detail. Molly Ramsay's cousin from Winona had even said, "Pardon me, but I couldn't help noticing — what an unusual ring you are wearing. Did you get it abroad?"

It was not these triumphs alone that made Isabel grieve for the ring; she really had come to love it for itself, and the pleasure that the colour and the workmanship could give her. It seemed as if the loss of it were too painful to be borne. "She had no right to touch it," she repeated miserably, to justify her own harshness. "She can't expect me to forgive her. She should have left it where she found it."

Fanny had found the ring on the glass shelf above the basin in the bath-room, and had slipped it on, secretly rejoicing in the excuse for wearing it, and intending to return it to its owner in a few minutes. And then Anna Paul had telephoned her to come over for dinner, and she had hurried to change her blouse,— and in the middle of dinner at Anna's, she had discovered that she no longer had the ring. She had come home in frightened haste, and had searched her room and the whole upper story of the house before she had broken the news to Isabel, who in the meantime had missed the ring and was having a quiet rummage on her own account.

Saturday was a gloomy day enough. After their work was done, the girls sat in their rooms with the doors closed, and tried to sew or study. Early in the afternoon Fanny, after a whispered consultation with her mother, went out with her coat and hat on. Isabel went down to the kitchen to press her chiffon scarf. She heard Fanny come back, and detected a rustling of paper in the hall.

When Isabel went up to her room a little later,

she found a bunch of red roses on her desk, in a vase of which she was particularly fond. "Roses don't make up for rings," she said stonily; and taking the vase in a firm cold hand, she set the flowers upon Fanny's table, where the child found them flaunting their unrelenting message when she came home from her music lesson at half-past four. Sprinkling them with tears, Fanny threw the roses out of her bedroom window, where they were soon frostbitten and withered.

Dinner was a far-from-lively affair. Father was thinking about his book and did not have much to say. Fanny and Isabel spoke frequently enough to their mother and Celia, so that their silence was not conspicuous to their father, but they did not address each other. Celia had been at a party during the afternoon and had much to tell, and her chatter saved the meal from being quite unendurable.

That evening Isabel sat at her desk wrestling with a hard passage of German drama. She was more miserable, it seemed to her, than she had ever been before in her life; but she kept doggedly on, hunting for words in the dictionary, and mumbling to herself a very confused translation. She was thinking, away back in her brain, of how Fanny's eyes had looked at dinner — so hurt, and so full of humiliation and distress. "Well, she shouldn't have meddled with the ring, then," said Isabel for the ten-thousandth time, to give justification to her own behaviour.

Suddenly she was aware that some one was standing beside her desk. She did not look up, for out of the corner of her eye she had caught a glimpse of Fanny's plaid skirts and tan shoes.

"The — terrors — of the — grim — scaffold," translated Isabel, fluttering the leaves of her book.

The form beside her made a motion of approach, and then stood still, waiting. Isabel kept her eyes on her book, but she could not see what she was reading.

Then a lean little hand was thrust before her, and on the pages of *Maria Stuart* dropped a small rattling mass of trinkets: the carnelian beads that Aunt Felicia had brought from California, and the silver bracelet that Anna Paul had given Fanny at Christmas, and the garnet pin that had been mother's when she was a girl. Isabel stared at the page where the group of ornaments had fallen. The hand went into a pocket, and then deposited something more on the open book — the tatting handkerchief that grandmother had tatted with her own fingers, the ivory edelweiss that Uncle Howard had bought in Switzerland, the silver spoon with the Carleton crest on it: one by one, all of Fanny's treasures were heaped on the sacrificial pile.

"Won't you take 'em all, Isabel?" stammered a humble voice. "I — I'd like to give 'em to you, if you'll only not be mad. Maybe they'll make up for the — the ring. I can't bear to have you act as if I were a — an insect."

"Won't you take 'em all, Isabel?" stammered a humble voice. "I'd like to give 'em to you, if you'll only not be mad." Page 120.

Isabel looked up at the pleading brown eyes, and the wretched face in its frame of straight black hair. Then she looked down at the things that lay upon the desk,— articles that Fanny loved as she herself had loved the pearl and coral ring. For a moment she thought she should burst out crying at the sight; but she only sat staring at her sister in a kind of daze. Then all at once she broke into a gale of laughter — Isabel's own merry laugh.

Fanny flushed, thinking for a breath of time that her gifts were scorned as all unworthy to be substituted for the ring; but she knew better when Isabel rose up and kissed her on the cheek.

"I couldn't take your pretty things, Angel Child," said Isabel, with a catch in her voice. "Put them back where they belong, and don't be a funny little goose." She was still laughing in hysterical relief.

"Oh, Isabel!" gasped Fanny, "aren't you mad any more — aren't you, honestly?"

"I'm not any more mad than a rabbit," Isabel replied; "honest to goodness, I'm not. Don't ever speak of that ring to me again. I lived quite a while without it, and now I guess I can live without it for another year or two. I know I've been a perfect fiend. I can't see what in the world was the matter with me."

Fanny ran to the hall. "Mother, mother!" she called. "Isabel isn't mad any more. She's just like herself again."

Mother came upstairs, and Celia, too, in her night-

gown, with Bobo in her arms. And all of them — except Bobo — had a good laugh together, without any mention of corals and pearls.

Two days afterward, at breakfast, Professor Carleton suddenly put his hand into his waistcoat pocket. "Dear me," he said regretfully; "I forgot something very important." The family stared at him over their soft-boiled eggs. "When I was going to a committee meeting the other day," he went on, "I found this in the dead leaves beside the walk. I thought it belonged to one of you girls, but I was in too much of a hurry to go back."

In his thumb and finger he held up the pearl and coral ring.

Isabel stretched out her hand. "Yes, father, it's mine," she said quietly. "It was lost a few days ago." There was no use in explaining to him, she thought.

Fanny opened her mouth to scream, but Isabel squeezed her hand under the table, and she relapsed into silence. Mother gave the girls a happy look, and whispered to Celia not to speak.

Father, oblivious of the excitement around the table, had taken up the morning paper, and was looking over the University news. "It was a good thing there wasn't a storm," he said absently, still scanning the headlines.

"There was!" groaned Isabel, *sotto voce*. And then she added in a low tone, "There's been fuss enough about the thing. Let's eliminate it from our

conversation;" with which high-flown remark, she slipped the lost treasure on her finger, and helped herself to another piece of hot toast.

CHAPTER IX

AMONG THE ARBUTUS BLOSSOMS

IT was a rainy night, late in April, and the fire was blazing on the hearth in the dining-room. Father was in his study, working on his book, Fanny was out at a dancing-school party, and Celia was in bed. Mrs. Carleton, Isabel, and Rodney Fox were concerned with the making of a rarebit over the chafing dish. They were talking about camping trips, and the out-doors, and the coming-on of spring.

"There's only one place in all the country round where the arbutus grows," said Rodney, who was stirring the rarebit while Isabel arranged the crackers on the plates. "You know where that is, don't you, Isabel? It's up at Morton's Mills, about twenty miles from here."

"I've never been there," answered Isabel. "You might turn off the flame, now, Rodney — but the Lenners went there last year, and they got ever so much — two or three baskets full. I don't think there's a lovelier flower on earth."

"Even a tiny bit is a joy," said Mrs. Carleton, from the little table beside the fireplace, where she was crocheting. "It's a miracle of fragrance."

"It would be fun if we could go this year and get some, wouldn't it?" said Rodney, watching Isabel

while she ladled out the rarebit, and poured it over the crackers.

"I wonder if we could," meditated Isabel. "There, Rod, that's for mother."

"This rain will bring out the flowers," said Mrs. Carleton, taking the plate that Rodney handed her. "Thank you. You certainly have had good luck this time with your rarebit, honey."

"It's not luck, but skill," laughed the young cook. "This is the way I learned it in Domestic Science. Gracious! if any rain will bring out the flowers, this ought to. Did you ever see such a downpour?" The wind whirled the rain against the glass, which rattled as if it were being pelted with drops of lead. The gurgling of the water in the gutters came distinctly from the street.

"I don't think Fanny ought to be out," said Mrs. Carleton looking worried. "I'm glad Mrs. Paul said she'd bring the girls home in a cab. Yes, this will be just the time for the arbutus."

"Sometimes you find it right under the snow," said Rodney eagerly.

"Not really under it!" cried Isabel.

"Well, there'll be crusts of snow in the moss under the trees, and you lift them up — and there it is!"

Isabel clasped her hands. "My! how I'd like to see it growing!"

"You can," answered Rodney. "Why don't we go up to Morton's Mills on Saturday, and get some? An arbutus party — wouldn't that be spiffy?"

"Perfectly ga-rand!" Isabel burst out. "There's no reason why we couldn't."

"We will," said Rodney. "I'll get it up. It's Thursday, isn't it? We can have it all planned tomorrow; and Saturday morning, if it isn't raining, we'll go,— just a few of us; a lot are too many."

"Don't you think it would be fine, mother?"

"Yes, I do. We don't get out into the woods as much as we ought to, at this time of year."

"Will you chaperon us, Mrs. Carleton?" asked Rodney.

"I'd be delighted." And she laughed. "I was dreadfully afraid I wasn't going to be invited."

"Who'll we have?"

"Molly, of course."

"And Eric."

"And Lois and Harry?"

"Yes; but don't you think that's enough?" said Rodney.

"Don't you want to ask Mr. Delafield and Evelyn Taylor?"

"No, I don't think so. I think we have just enough as it is. Do you especially want them?"

"No, but I didn't know that you'd be satisfied with an all-high-school crowd."

"Depends upon who's in it. Is there anyone you want to ask, Mrs. Carleton?"

"No — except Fanny. I think she'd like to go."

"Oh, yes, of course, we'll take Fanny. Mother'll put up the lunch for us," added Rodney.

"Oh, no! Isabel and I will provide the lunch," said Mrs. Carleton.

"Well, anyway, mother'll want to send something."

"Then let it be one of her delicious chocolate cakes," said Isabel. "Nobody makes such good chocolate cakes as your mother does."

"She'll do it. And I'll bring oranges."

"And we'll make sandwiches —"

They chattered on, making eager preparations. The last of the rarebit was gone, and they sat closer around the fire, talking of the pine woods, and the delights of picnics and forest rambles.

Saturday morning was soft, warm, and bright. The rain had dried away, and the air had all the freshness of spring, with a touch of heat that was very grateful after the long cold months of a Middle Western winter.

At the station the party met, with baskets and boxes of lunch, cameras, field-glasses, and thermos-bottles. The girls wore short skirts, and had middy blouses under their coats. The boys were negligently clad in old clothes and canvas puttees.

The trip of three quarters of an hour carried them through rolling hills, where squares of fresh earth showed the spring ploughing, and the grass was green on sunny knolls. Greyish-coloured sheep, with young lambs wabbling by their sides were grazing in the fields, never raising their heads as the cars spun by. Crows flew across the pastures. At the

farm houses a great deal seemed to be going on, and children, freed from school, were "teetering," climbing trees, and feeding broods of tiny chickens.

After a while, the hills grew higher, and foaming streams gushed over the rocks. Against the sky, pine trees began to show darkly,— scattered at first, and then more closely massed.

"Morton's Mills!" called the brakeman.

The party hurried out, eager to see the place. The station was a mere platform on the edge of the woods, and the receding train seemed to be carrying away all connection with the outer world.

"Isn't it too romantic!" exclaimed Molly Ramsay. "Look at the old mill!"

The ruins of a saw-mill stood against a group of pines, where layers of needles lay under the low blue-green branches. There was a battered "race," and through the broken floor of the mill they could see the water-wheel, and an array of rusty machinery.

Beyond the grove was the forest of oak and maple interspersed with pines. The branches, high and lacy, showed a faint haze of pinkish green from the opening buds. A corduroy road led into the woods.

"What a day!" "Aren't you glad we came?" "Why haven't we been here before?" "*Some* place — eh?" These were the remarks that floated into the April air.

The boys hid the baskets away in a corner of the mill, where birds fluttered off their nests in the rafters, and chipmunks scuttled out of sight among the piles of logs rotting on the floor.

Then the party all marched into the woods singing *Where the River Shannon Flows.*

"Keep within call," shouted Rodney. "We don't want to go home and leave anyone here with the chipmunks."

"Might be something bigger than chipmunks, too," supplemented Harry Kilpatrick.

"Are there *bears?*" faltered Lois Tucker, her eyes getting round.

"Such animals have been known to exist," Rodney replied. "And they're not all in the Zoo, either."

"It's a good thing we have manly protectors," laughed Mrs. Carleton.

"I'll stay near *you,* mother," said Fanny.

"She doesn't think much of the protectors," murmured Rodney.

They plunged deeper into the woods, separating into pairs or groups.

"How shall we know where the arbutus is?" asked Isabel of Rodney, who had kept close beside her.

"Ah, we'll know," said the boy enigmatically. "Wait and see."

"I want to look up all the time at the sky, and the branches with the green and red buds," said Isabel.

"No way to find arbutus, but a very good way of getting a bumped nose," answered Rodney. "It's pretty rough walking, and you'll have to look down or let me lead you."

"Well, I'll watch where I'm going."

They walked on in silence among the boles of the oaks and maples, or brushing through the groups of pines. Occasionally they heard the flicker of a bird's wings, or the scolding of a squirrel, angry at this human invasion. Their feet rustled and padded through half-dried leaves or soggy patches of pine needles.

Isabel kept her eyes ranging among the mosses. All at once she fell on her knees with a cry of pleasure. "Oh, you darlings!" she exclaimed.

Peeping out from the dark green and brown moss was an edge of pink — the most delicate shell-pink imaginable — a hint of what was hidden. Hurriedly Isabel lifted the moss, and underneath it was a larger mass of pink blossoms, fresh, untouched, the star-shaped calyxes and round carmine buds shining among the rusty green of the leaves and roots.

"Did you ever see anything so exquisite?" she gasped.

"They're the real thing," said Rodney briefly. "No dye and cotton about those." He stooped over, to break the roots that clung hard to the ground, as if they resented being disturbed. "I knew you'd be crazy over 'em." His cheeks were glowing. And while they were both reaching for the blossoms and pulling away the moss, he and Isabel found their hands touching and their heads close together. A strange feeling of self-consciousness came over them.

Isabel drew back. "I *am* crazy over them," she

said. She held a handful of the flowers to her cheek. The air was heavy with the scent. "Aren't they like beautiful little fairy children?" she murmured, with a smile. She was still kneeling in the moss.

"I knew you would love them," said Rodney. "It was on your account that I wanted to come. The other girls don't understand such things — not as you do." He put his hand on hers and held it, and looking up into his eyes, she saw an expression there that she had never seen before. Somehow he seemed a different Rodney,— older, stronger, finer, full of gentle but vigorous purpose, moved with tender feeling, not as a boy is, but as a grown man may be. They looked at each other, not shyly, nor yet boldly, but with a sweet friendliness that they did not entirely understand. For several minutes they stayed thus, kneeling on the ground and looking at each other. Then Isabel drew her hand away and rose. Rodney plucked another handful of the flowers, and got up from the moss.

"There must be plenty more about here," he said vaguely, looking about among the leaves. Isabel's eyes did not meet his now, and she busied herself in rearranging the blossoms that she held.

"Whoo-hoo!" called Eric Thomas, not far away through the bushes. "Everybody all right?"

"I should say!" answered Rodney with an enthusiasm that made Isabel blush.

"Do you find any, Isabel?" called Mrs. Carleton.

"Yes, yes! It's lovely," answered the girl warmly. "It's wonderful!"

"We've found bushels," shouted Fanny, "and haven't seen a bear yet."

"Time enough," consoled Eric from somewhere beyond a clump of pines.

"Oh-h!" shrieked Lois, "there's something up in a tree — ugh! a queer thing. Look! It isn't big enough for a bear, but goodness knows what it is."

They all came rustling and crackling through the underbrush, the girls hesitatingly, the boys excitedly.

On a high limb of an oak tree was a dark object crouched down as if asleep or terrified.

"What can it be?" said Molly, backing away. "Do you think it will jump down on us?"

"Aw, I know what it is," said Harry, rather proud of his knowledge. "It's a porcupine. I've seen them on my uncle's timber-land in Bayfield County."

"Are they fierce?" queried Lois timidly.

"About as fierce as a last year's bird's nest," responded Harry.

"But they shoot their quills, don't they?" said Fanny, keeping at a safe distance. "Look out, or you'll be a human pin-cushion."

"Not likely," said Eric. "Here, let's all take a look at it through the field-glasses." They gazed at the stupid rough creature through the glasses, and turned away somewhat disappointed that it was not more exciting.

"A bear would have been more interesting," commented Isabel, "and not any more dangerous."

They began to gather arbutus again, getting more and more skilful in detecting it in its secluded nooks. Every bunch that was disclosed seemed more waxy and fragrant than the bunch before. Isabel and Rodney, keeping together a good deal of the time, did not say much, nor look in each other's faces, but they were happy without expressing their happiness, and absorbed in their own thoughts.

"Time for lunch!" called Mrs. Carleton, when the sun had mounted to the centre of the sky. They made their way back to the mill, and found the baskets where they had left them. Mrs. Carleton spread a white cloth on the ground, and everybody gathered around her while she took out the sandwiches, a dish of salad, and then cookies, cake, oranges, and olives. Paper cups were filled with hot coffee from the thermos-bottles, and soon the lunch began to disappear, among exclamations of satisfaction and harmless jokes and snatches of popular songs. Mrs. Fox's chocolate cake was cut, with three cheers for Rodney, and the complimentary chorus,

"He's a high-rolling, rollicking boy,"

sung with unctuous emphasis, and a circle of fingers pointed in his direction. Rodney acknowledged the attention by a dancing-school bow, and then rendered himself speechless by putting three olives into his mouth at once.

"It's too lovely for anything," sighed Molly, who, with her red Tam o' Shanter on one side, and her

black hair blown about her face, was eating a huge piece of chocolate cake.

"What's too lovely — the cake?" said Eric teasingly.

"Yes, it's hyper-glorious," answered Molly with her mouth full. "But I meant the day and the trip and everything."

"Perhaps you mean the company you're in," added Rodney.

"That couldn't be better," said Molly, looking around beatifically at the group. Molly had the gift of strong affections, and those that she loved, she loved much. "Somehow, you never know how fond you are of people until you get out like this, away from all the things that seem to clutter up your everyday living. Isn't that so, Peaches-and-Cream?" She turned suddenly to Isabel, who, holding her piece of cake poised before her, was looking dreamily off across the river.

Isabel started guiltily, and dropped the cake into her lap. The colour grew deeper in her cheeks. "Yes, of course it's true if you say so, Molly," she answered rather peevishly, "but you don't need to give anyone such a jolt. I thought you were just talking to the squirrels."

Everybody laughed at her confusion, and she picked the cake crumbs out of her lap, and called for another piece. Her mother looked at her keenly over the picnic feast, and wondered what was the matter with Isabel.

"Just a few more bunches!" cried Eric, jumping

up, when everybody had eaten all that was possible. "I know dozens of people who'll think themselves blighted for life if we don't give them any."

"Me, too," said Lois Tucker, beginning to clear away the remains of the lunch. "We'll put what we've gathered into the baskets, and then try to find a little more."

They filled the lunch-baskets with the sweet-smelling clusters that they had heaped upon the ground, and then sprinkled them with water from the creek.

Fanny, lured by the ripple of the stream, ventured out upon some stepping-stones, in spite of the protests of her mother. One foot slipped, and she found herself over her shoe-top in the icy water. She dripped and spattered her way to shore, much crestfallen, and submitted to being led away to the mill, where she had to sit with one foot curled under her, while her stocking hung out in the sun to dry.

"Oh, dear, I always get into a mess of some kind, if there's any to get into," she said ruefully, as her mother wiped the sopping shoe with the towel that had been around the sandwiches. "How do you ever stand me?" She followed the others wistfully with her eyes as they disappeared in the woods. Mrs. Carleton, however, was not averse to resting at the door of the old mill, and "simmering" as she said, in the loveliness of the April noon-time.

After a while, the young people all came back, and they sat about on logs, waiting for the half-past-three train.

"It's been a perfect day," said Isabel with a sigh of contentment.

"It sure has," echoed Rodney.

Isabel seemed to hear something in his voice that was not intended for the others. She was glad that she sat behind them, for she knew that she was flushing again under the sunburn, and she did not want to meet anybody's eyes, not even Rodney's. She felt vaguely in her heart that the boy could never be quite the same free and easy chum that he had always been. There was something different between them.

She was very silent on the way home, thinking of odd, undefined, disturbing things. She had never understood before that there was so much beneath the surface of life. It looked so smooth and commonplace, and then all at once it opened and showed glimpses of undreamed-of possibilities. It had all seemed so simple until lately, and now —

"I suppose that's what it means to grow up," she said to herself,—"finding so many more things right under your nose than you ever thought were there." And then she looked over at her mother, who, with her arm around Fanny, was gazing serenely through the car-window at the landscape scudding by. "How complicated her life is," meditated Isabel in a kind of slow surprise. "I never thought of it before,— but with the house, and the outside interests, and father, and us girls,— and all of us depending on her for everything that makes us happy, she has to be a dozen people in one.

Why, it's a terrible and wonderful thing to be a woman!"

She was so absorbed in the new ideas that had come to her in that twenty-mile ride, that she woke as from a trance when the train pulled into the station at Jefferson.

CHAPTER X

THE TRIALS OF AN AUTHOR

ISABEL leaned her head on her hand, and thought. She was labouring, as she had done for a number of evenings now, on her graduation essay and her valedictory speech. The essay was on *The Work of William Morris*, rather too ambitious a subject for a high-school girl, however bright she might be in her classes. Isabel had had a craze for Morris, and had begged to be allowed to choose a subject relating to his activities in poetry and art. Now she heartily wished she had tried something simpler. All the spring, she had been reading and taking notes, and several times she had talked over the essay with her English teacher; but the actual task of writing must now be performed. Mr. Stacy had issued a command that all essays should be finished at a certain date, and that date had now come appallingly near.

To-night she was struggling with the half-finished essay, which was a mass of papers of all sizes and colours, full of notes, scrawls, passages cut up with corrections, and other passages copied out neatly. She was trying to arrange her material in some regular and emphatic order. "Oh, dear!" she groaned, "what shall I say next? Ought this idea

to come in now, or shall I save it for the last? I've just got to do something with it, or I shall go mad."

She was one of five, chosen out of the large class, to give an essay at Commencement, and had accepted the honour with the feeling that writing something or other would not be very much of an effort. The essays and stories that she had written for her composition classes had always gone rather easily and brought good marks. But now she felt baffled and irritated, quite out of conceit with the whole matter.

"It's the worst struggle I ever had," she said to herself; "if writing a book is anything like this, no books for me! I think I'd rather go out as a 'plain seamstress.'"

She toiled on, fitting parts together, rewriting passages, interlining, and revising. Presently she heard the clock strike the half-hour. It was half-past eleven. Her head was heavy, and her eyes were very unwilling to stay open.

"I can't do any more to-night," she murmured. "but I do feel that I've accomplished something, and can finish the thing in a day or two."

Sleepily, she ran through the sheaf of papers, grouping the sheets together, and laying the different sorts of material on a chair that stood beside her, and on the shelf of her desk. "It certainly looks messy," she admitted, beginning to take off her collar and her belt, "but I know exactly what each of those heaps of hen-scratching means. In the morning, I'll put them away more carefully."

While she undressed, she thought over the arrangement that she had decided on, and it seemed as good as she could make it. It was with a sigh of relief as well as of weariness that she turned off the light, opened her window, and tumbled into bed.

The next morning she found that she had overslept. Her mother had called her as usual, but she had gone to sleep again. She had barely time to eat her breakfast and rush to school.

"I haven't time to do my room, mother," she called as she was putting on her wraps, "but I'll do it this noon. It won't hurt it to air, you know."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Carleton; "we'll leave it."

But when Isabel came home at noon, the room was in perfect order. The bed was made, the desk closed; all scattered articles were neatly put away, and the shades half-lowered. On the desk stood a glass vase holding two yellow daffodils.

"Oh, did you straighten my room, mother?" asked Isabel from the bath-room where she was scrubbing the morning's grime from her hands.

"No," replied Mrs. Carleton from the hall. "Olga did it. She said she thought you had enough to do, and she hurried her kitchen work to attend to your room before you came home."

"How good of her!" said Isabel. "Olga certainly is a jewel, and no mistake."

She strolled back into her room, polishing her nails with a bit of chamois, and feeling relieved that she had "time to breathe," before going to school.

Then the thought struck her that she had better assure herself of the safety of her manuscript. She opened the lid of her desk. Everything was in apple-pie order; pens and pencils were laid out in a tray, pigeon-holes stiffly arranged. Where was the mass of white and blue and yellow paper that contained the precious essay?

With her heart in her mouth, Isabel opened one drawer after another, though she knew that each one was crammed. No manuscript rewarded her search. Frantically, she went through the dresser drawers, the shelves of the clothes-closet, the shirt-waist box. Nothing.

Pale and wide-eyed, she ran downstairs, and stood at the sitting-room door. Through the door into the dining-room she could see the table set for luncheon, and Olga moving about with a tray and glasses. Mrs. Carleton looked up from the lace that she was sewing on Fanny's new muslin *guimpe*. "What's the matter, child? What *has* happened?" she cried.

"My essay! My graduation essay," the girl said in a smothered tone. "Do you know where it is?"

"Why, no. Isn't it in your room?"

"I left it in a muddle on a chair last night. I was too tired to put it away. Olga —?" She could not say what was in her thought.

With an alarmed face, Mrs. Carleton started up, putting her work down on the table. "It isn't — destroyed, is it?"

"I'm afraid so,— oh, I'm dreadfully afraid that it is! Will you ask Olga? I daren't."

She held her hands tightly together, and looked out of the window at the rows of purple irises along the walk, trying not to be afraid.

When Mrs. Carleton came back, her face told the story.

"She *burned* it, mother?" gasped Isabel.

"Yes, dear. She said it looked 'so scrappy and good-for-not'in',' and she didn't think it was anything that counted."

"Oh, mother!"

"She wanted your room to look nice when you came home. And she got the daffodils for you, herself, when she went to market."

"Oh-h! Burned! And I worked so hard — so hard! Nobody knows what a time I've had. Oh, my lovely essay!" wailed the girl, with quivering lips.

Mrs. Carleton drew the bright head to her own shoulder. "There! there! never mind, darling," she said. "Don't cry."

"I'm not going to cry," moaned Isabel. "What good would that do? I'm beyond crying." She took her mother's hand, and held it hard.

"Olga means so well," said Mrs. Carleton miserably. "Poor Olga! She ought to have known better, but she didn't."

"Oh, but, Mummy, *anybody* would know —"

"Not Olga. Essays don't mean anything to her, you know."

"She ought to have asked!"

"She thought she was doing right."

"Did you tell her what the papers were — now, I mean?"

"No, I just asked her if she had burned up some papers that were on a chair and on your desk. I didn't scold her — I couldn't. Do you think I should?"

"Dear me, no. Of course not. What's the use of hurting her feelings?" Isabel drew a long breath. "Well, there's nothing for it, but to get busy and write the terrible thing over again. Perhaps Mr. Stacy will give me an extra day or two."

"I'm so sorry —"

"Don't worry, Old-Lady-who-lived-in-a-Shoe. It'll be all right." Isabel was bravely trying to smile.

Olga, who had been in the kitchen, now came timidly to the sitting-room door. With her round heavy face, light hair severely combed back, and stocky form in neat blue gingham, she was the picture of kind and stupid faithfulness. "Loonch is ready, Mississ Carleton," she said, looking anxiously at the two women standing inside the door. "Miss Isabel," she added dubiously, "I do your room this morning so nice as I could —"

"Thank you, Olga," said Isabel cordially. "It was awfully good of you. And thank you for the flowers."

Olga smiled happily. "I yoost saw 'em, and I

know you like 'em, and so I buy soom. They look yoost like you, Miss Isabel."

"Well, thank you for the compliment, too."

Olga still stood hesitating, and began to fumble at the edge of her apron. "Your mother ask about soom papers. I burned a few. Is it soom harm?"

"No, Olga, it's all right," answered Isabel as cheerfully as she could. "It's really all right. Don't worry."

The maid went away looking consoled if doubtful. And just then Professor Carleton came in from the University, and Fanny and Celia slid down the banisters with wild whoops, racing to see which one would be first at the table. In the general confusion Isabel was able to compose herself, and to go to her place as if nothing had happened. But her heart was like lead, and her brain was a whirling mass of questions, in which "What shall I do?" was uppermost.

She walked to school alone after luncheon, and as she went, she turned the matter of the essay over in her mind. "Why should it happen to *me?*" she said to herself. "Nobody else has such troubles, I'm very sure. It seems as if I'm the mark for all the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortunes.'" And then she added, somewhat ashamed, "Well, I shan't go around complaining about it, anyway. I don't care to have anybody pity me."

She did not mention the burned essay to a soul, not even when Molly Ramsay said to her, "Are you going to have your essay finished on time?"

"Oh, I think so," Isabel answered in an off-hand way. "Did you notice the lovely new gowns in Keeley and Neckermann's window? Let's walk around that way after school."

"Writing a graduation essay doesn't worry *you* much, does it?" said Molly admiringly.

"Why should I worry?" Isabel replied with a grimace that simple-hearted Molly took for an expression of lofty superiority to all the trials of would-be authors.

"I'm sure you'll be a great novelist some day," said Molly, who had the deepest faith in Isabel's gifts; "and I certainly shall be proud to say that I used to go to school with you, and eat pea-nut brittle out of the same paper bag!" The girls were munching sweets in a corner of the cloak-room.

"More likely I'll be doing plain sewing, and you'll bring me your children's rompers to make," Isabel replied with a hint of bitterness in her usually gentle tones.

When she got home from school after the stroll with Molly around Capitol Square, Isabel found the mahogany tea-table set out in her room, with the Canton cups and the thin old tea-spoons. "Mummy-Carl is trying to console me!" she said to herself, "and I won't cry a tear and hurt her feelings."

Just then Mrs. Carleton entered the room, followed by Olga carrying a tray with the tea and hot buttered toast and marmalade. Celia and Bobo were trailing on behind.

"Oh, mother!" said Isabel with a sudden remem-

brance, "you were going to the reception for Frau Von Ende this afternoon! Did you stay away on my account?"

"Why, I thought you might be feeling blue after your stroke of bad luck, and so I telephoned Mrs. Henderson that I couldn't come, and I made father go without me. It won't hurt me to stay away."

"Oh! oh! such a mother!" groaned Isabel. "But what a cosy tea we'll have all by ourselves." A little later, mixing "cambric" tea for Celia, she confessed, "I'm afraid I should have cried a wee bit, if I hadn't found this gaiety here to make me forget my catastrophe. Oh, let's give Bobo some cream, Celia. See how the poor fellow is coaxing and purring."

"What are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Carleton, helping herself to the orange marmalade; "about the burned treasure, I mean."

"Nothing, for a day or two," Isabel responded. "I have to think it over."

So on Thursday evening, she went calmly to the moving-pictures with Molly and Eric Thomas. And on Friday evening, Fred Delafield and Evelyn Taylor and Rodney Fox were over, and they all sang college songs, and then sat out on the steps, in the soft May air, and watched the new moon go down.

"You're a lady of leisure now that your essay is done, aren't you?" said Rodney. "I suppose you've finished it, for Eric told me you were at the movies last night."

"It does seem good not to have anything to do,"

said Isabel, with an irony that was lost on the hilarious group.

On Saturday morning, after breakfast, Isabel shut herself in her room with her fountain pen and plenty of paper. And then she opened the door a crack to call to Fanny, "If I'm not down for lunch, will you bring me a hand-out, Angel Child?"

"Why?" answered Fanny. "Am I your servant, Mrs. Astor-Vanderbilt?"

"Well, I have some work to do. But don't bring me anything if you don't want to. Maybe Celia will."

"Don't worry. I'll bring you a tooth-pick and a glass of water, to save you from starvation," Fanny conceded, and Isabel closed the door, which had a large *Busy* sign affixed to it.

At noon she did not appear, and Fanny brought her a plate of cold meat and creamed potatoes.

At three o'clock, Mrs. Carleton tapped at the door. "You'll wear yourself out, child," she said anxiously. "What are you doing, anyway?"

Isabel opened the door. Her hair was in disorder, and her face was flushed, and there were dark lines under her eyes. "I'm composing," she said tragically. "Don't disturb the Infant Genius."

"Shall you have finished by five o'clock?" asked Mrs. Carleton tranquilly. "The Lenners want us to go for an automobile ride."

"I should say!" replied the girl. "Me for the buzz-wagon! Nothing but slang will express my feelings."

She was very silent all through the drive, but that fact was hardly noticeable, since the Lenners always had plenty to say. Isabel went to bed early, too tired to keep her eyes open.

The next morning she shut herself in her room again, and the family went off to church. At the dinner-table she laid before her father a sheaf of neatly written manuscript. "There!" she said. "Read that at your leisure, Mr. Professor."

"What is it?" asked Professor Carleton, adjusting his glasses. "Not the Great American Novel, I hope."

"Not yet," said Isabel. "It's a graduation essay entitled *The Work of William Morris,* and a tacked-on valedictory."

"Done, daughter?" queried Mrs. Carleton, dropping the gravy spoon and spattering the clean tablecloth.

"Done," answered Isabel with a flourishing gesture.

Just then Olga came into the room, and Isabel stopped abruptly. "You may go on whipping the cream, Olga," said Mrs. Carleton, and the maid returned to the kitchen.

"Now I'm going to reveal the secret of my life," Isabel went on. "Olga burned my graduation essay, and I had to write another."

"Isabel! Not really!" said Fanny, who held graduation essays in the supremest awe. "Why, I should think you'd have been crying your eyes out!"

"And you never said a word!" Professor Carle-

ton exclaimed, taking off his glasses and staring across at Isabel. "I didn't suppose girls had any self-control when it came to matters of that sort."

"What little I have, I've inherited from mother," smiled the girl. And then she continued eagerly, "It was awfully queer — almost weird, you know. I had such a terrible struggle with the other one, and I just *couldn't* seem to do anything with it. It almost drove me mad. And then, when I sat down and began to write this one, I didn't have any trouble at all. Some of the time I felt as if I were a medium, or whatever you call it; the stuff just seemed to write itself, as if my arm was the only part of me that was working. Sometimes it didn't go very fast, but all the time I knew what I wanted to say, and found a way to say it in."

"Is it as good as the other?" asked Professor Carleton doubtfully.

"Better," said the young authoress, "heaps better. I honestly think it will do."

"It starts off well," said the professor, glancing down the page. "I'll go over it with you after dinner."

"I'm so hungry, I shall starve to death right here in my chair," said Isabel. "Do carve for us, father. The veal roast looks delicious."

"It seems to me that a medium should have a very slender appetite," said Professor Carleton, taking up the carving knife. "I think I'll get you to write the rest of my book for me while I go trout-fishing and play golf," he added, deftly slicing the meat.

"I'm afraid the spell is broken," Isabel laughed; "at least I'm so tired I'm in a state of collapse. But I'm very glad now that I didn't go around whining. This has been a lesson to me. You never know what you can do till you get right down and dig."

"Preparation and concentration — those are the two things that get the results," said father, serving the mashed potato.

"I think Isabel is awfully smart," piped Celia, who did not understand what the talk was all about, but felt called upon to make some remark.

"Only when she has to be," corrected Big Sister, patting the little one's hand.

"Wouldn't it be awful to have a Genius in the family?" said Fanny in a subdued tone. She looked at Isabel with real respect, and her usual teasing air had vanished.

"We should worry!" drawled Isabel, making a face at Fanny. "Oh, do pass the gravy and the bread and the celery, and everything else. I'm so hungry I don't know where I'm going to stay tonight."

CHAPTER XI

THE FRENCHMAN

MR. STACY expressed himself as well satisfied with Isabel's essay. "You must have spent a good deal of time on this," he said, after he had read it through.

"Well, I did, first and last," the girl replied, laughing a little.

"When it is shortened a trifle, it will be quite all right," the principal went on. "See Miss Wilson about cutting out a bit where you can, and then you may begin drilling. I want you to do especially well, since you're the valedictorian."

For the next two weeks, Isabel was much occupied, in learning the essay and the farewell speech, and in being drilled by the "vocal expression" teacher, so that she might make a successful appearance at the Commencement exercises. She was studying for the final examinations, too, and there were various athletic and social events that she must not on any account miss. It seemed as if each day were three or four hours too short.

"But we must get in a picnic or two," said Evelyn Taylor, "before I go home, and Fred goes West again."

"We certainly must," agreed Isabel. And so there were hurried excursions, all the more delightful, perhaps, for being impromptu and very brief: an automobile trip to Pheasant Branch, a Sunday night supper on the bank of the Lake, a Saturday breakfast at Maple Bluff, and a canoe trip with a hasty "snack" at Picnic Point. It was all very simple and friendly and delightful.

Then, at home, came the incident of the Frenchman.

Professor Carleton folded the letter and put his glasses into their case, as he sat down to the luncheon table. Olga was already bringing in the cream-of-celery soup.

"A letter from Cousin Eunice," he said, looking over at Mrs. Carleton; she was passing the wafers to Celia, who had to be back at school early to "practise her piece."

"Yes, I thought so when I saw the black border. Don't eat so fast, Celia dear — there's plenty of time."

"At Naples," the professor went on, beginning to eat his soup, "she met a young Frenchman who was coming to the States. He wants a position. She thought I might be able to help him."

"Is he coming to Jefferson?"

"Yes, he's coming on as soon as he can transact some business in New York."

"I suppose we'll have to invite him for dinner, and have frogs' legs," interpolated Fanny.

Celia looked up, shocked, from her last spoonful of soup. "Frogs' legs! Oh, Fanny! Do Frenchmen eat the poor little things' legs?"

"Yes, they fry them in butter by the dozen, don't they, mother? I read it in a book."

"That's why a Frenchman is called Johnny Crapaud," spoke up Isabel, proud of her bit of information.

"It's a very bad time for him to come," continued Professor Carleton, ignoring the interruption. "The colleges will soon be closed — or at least the summer sessions are all arranged for."

"Yes, but it gives him time to find a place for the fall," said Mrs. Carleton, with a whispered admonition to Celia.

"If he has good credentials, he may get into the department here. They haven't filled that young Mallonnier's place — or they hadn't, the last time I inquired."

"Perhaps, Arthur," said Mrs. Carleton quickly, "he might do for a tutor for Isabel during the summer."

"Oh!" said Isabel, laying down her fork and looking from her mother to her father.

"He might," replied Professor Carleton. "I want her to perfect herself in French, and get the best accent, which is hard enough to acquire even with a 'native' teacher. I don't see why she mightn't profit by the long vacation, instead of frittering it away."

"Wouldn't it be exciting to have a really French

tutor, right from France," said Fanny. "All the girls would be perfectly emerald-green with envy."

Isabel flushed. "Doesn't he speak any English at all, father?" she asked.

"Will he *parley-voo* all the time?" added Fanny.

"Cousin Eunice says that he speaks English very well."

"Of course, we'll have to wait till we see him," said Mrs. Carleton thoughtfully. "And perhaps he won't want to bother with pupils. No, Celia, you must eat your potato and meat. I can't have you going to school hungry. And you must take a cooky in your bag, to eat at recess. Tell Olga to give you one before you go."

"If he comes on quickly from New York, he ought to be here in a few days," said the professor, glancing at the date of the letter, which lay beside his plate.

In fact, it was only the next day, at five o'clock in the afternoon, that a young man, slender and distinguished-looking, with an upturned black moustache, came to the door, presenting a letter of introduction from Cousin Eunice. Fanny and Isabel, who were upstairs, saw him from a front window, and were jumping up and down with excitement.

"He's so romantic looking." This from Fanny, who usually scorned romance. "I'm sure he'll turn out to be a count in disguise." She spoke in a stage whisper, though the caller was safe in the parlour.

"Or a gentleman burglar," answered Isabel, craning her neck over the banister in spite of the fact that there was nothing to see.

"Well, that's just as interesting, and more so," said Fanny. "It's queer about these 'furriners'; you can't tell anything about them from the looks. Don't you remember that Polish count that visited Professor Prokotschsky? He had a snub nose and scraggly whiskers, and wore the funniest hats. There wasn't the least scrap of romantic-ness about *him.*"

"This one has the newest-looking gloves," said Isabel absently. She was thinking of all sorts of strange possibilities, with which gloves had nothing to do. "Do you suppose he lives in a garret, like the *Jeune Homme Pauvre?*"

"Oh, I do hope he'll be your tutor," cried Fanny. "It will be so interesting. Maybe he'll fall in love with you, Isabel."

"What nonsense!" answered the older girl, flushing scarlet, and taking up her crocheting which she had dropped at the advent of the caller. "A little American snip like me wouldn't count for anything, when he's seen so many lovely French girls."

"I'll bet you're just as good-looking as any of them," protested Fanny loyally. "Professor Lenner was just telling mother yesterday —"

"Oh, hush, Fanny! Don't be silly!"

"Well, I'll tell you sometime what he said," Fanny retorted.

"French girls are all pale and interesting," meditated Isabel, "with black hair — like yours, Angel Child — and the dreamiest black eyes." And then she added briskly, "I've got my Commencement

essay to say over again. I always mix up that passage beginning 'Impatient with the ugliness that he saw on every side,' because we cut something out of it after I began to learn it." The two girls were in Isabel's room, now, where the late sun was pouring in a strong yellow light.

"I'll say it for you," cried Fanny, scrambling to her feet and mounting the cretonne-covered shirt-waist box. And she began, in a shrill "elocutionary" tone, throwing her arms about in stiff wild gestures, "Im-pa-a-atient, with the ug-g-g-li-ness-s-s that he s-s-saw on ev-er-y s-s-side, he be-gan to ah-h-sk himself the ques-s-st-yuh-hun —"

"Oh, mercy, Fanny! Don't," begged Isabel. "You murder it so! Oh, stop! I'll give you my Cluny lace collar if you'll never do it again."

"Will you, honestly?" queried the orator, whirling on one foot, on the shirt-waist box.

"Honour bright."

"Well, I like the collar," said Fanny slowly, "but it's such fun to tease you — I don't know whether I can give that up or not." Then she began again, "Im-pa-hay-shunt at the uh-hug-li-nes-s-s —"

With a squeal, Isabel put her hands over her ears. "I'll never be able to say it right if you do that," she wailed. "It's real lace, Fanny, and you know how nice it looks with your blue linen dress, and with the black velvet bow that mother gave you. You'd better take it."

Fanny stepped down from the box. "It does give a nice finish to the dress," she conceded, "and

I never had a real lace collar. Hark! Somebody's left the door open; they're talking in French, aren't they? Well, hand over the collar, humble victim of my power!"

Isabel went to the second drawer of the dresser, and took out the folded lace collar. "I was going to give it to you anyway," she said, with a twinkle in her eyes. "It needs mending in the back, where it's been pinned down, and besides I'm tired of it. It's too childish for me!"

"Childish!" cried Fanny in vexation. "How mean you are, Isabella of Spain! You just want to spoil it for me. I don't care! It looks nice on my blue dress, anyway. I guess I can afford to be childish a little while longer. *I'm* not eighteen my next birthday."

"I don't see that I'm any meaner than you are, Frances Everard Carleton," said the older girl, laughing good-naturedly. "You wanted to spoil my essay, and that's of more importance than a collar."

Just then they heard voices in the hall below; the guest was evidently departing.

"Can you understand what they're saying?" asked Fanny eagerly.

"You wouldn't have me eavesdrop, would you?" teased Isabel. "No, I can't understand much; but I think mother's asking him to come back for dinner — she's saying something about *six et demi heures*. Goodness! We must change our dresses. I'm going to put on my dotted muslin and my green sash."

"Huh, I'm not," said Fanny. "I don't see any

use in making a fuss for a little whiffet of a Frenchman. A middy blouse is good enough for him, I'm sure."

"Gracious! you *are* formal! You know mother never lets you come to dinner in a middy blouse, even when we're alone. Go and put on the blue linen, at least. You look *très distinguée* in that."

"You needn't talk French to me," sniffed Fanny. "I'm a plain Yankee."

"Not so very plain in the blue linen," corrected Isabel merrily. "Now, go on, Miss Obstinate, and make yourself beautiful for the little Frenchman. Who knows but he may fall in love with *you?*"

"You needn't be sarcastic, either," Fanny replied, but she was smiling, too. She was wearing a middy blouse and a short white drilling skirt, below which a considerable length of thin ankle was showing. Her hair was tied up carelessly with a dark red ribbon, very becoming, for it set off her olive complexion and flashing black eyes. Fanny had never given much thought to her appearance, but now she was beginning to have "spells of primping," as Isabel called them, during which she experimented with colours, and tried doing her hair in various ways. She was not at all averse to being called *très distinguée,* though she assumed a high disregard of all the arts of the toilette.

"You'll dress, won't you?" asked Isabel, beginning to take off her own muslin blouse.

"Of course," answered Fanny. "I meant to, all along, Madam Fuss-and-Feathers." And she

skipped away to her own room, pulling her middy off over her head as she went.

Isabel took more pains than usual with her hair and her sash, and she rejoiced that she had cleaned her white pumps that noon. Presently she heard her mother coming upstairs to dress. "Well, Mummy," she said, standing in the door and fastening her string of Roman pearl beads, "did you like him? He's going to stay for dinner, isn't he? And does father think he can do something for him?"

"I can't answer so many questions at once," said Mrs. Carleton, smiling. "Yes, he's very nice; and he's going to stay to dinner — or come back, rather. He had to look after his luggage or something. I see you've been getting ready for him. Is Fanny making herself presentable, too?"

"Yes, I insisted on it," said Isabel, with a little maternal air that she sometimes adopted when she was speaking to or of her younger sister. "I don't want him to think that American girls are careless and informal."

"Well, I'm not worried about what he thinks," Mrs. Carleton replied, going on into her room, "but I want to be friendly to him on Cousin Eunice's account. She usually has good judgment, and I think he is a very worthy young man." Isabel had followed her mother across the hall. "He says he's been ill, and needed a change of scene," Mrs. Carleton went on. "I suspect that he's rather hard up, though he didn't say so exactly. I must hurry and change, for it's getting late."

"Can I do anything for you, mother? I'm all dressed."

"Yes, bring Celia upstairs and undress her. She's worn out and as nervous as a witch, thinking about her 'piece.' I wish the schools wouldn't put so many burdens on seven-year-old children. I've telephoned Milly Hogan to come and look after Celia, and give her her dinner here in my room."

"I'll bring her up here, and tell her a story," said Isabel, running down the stairs.

Dinner was a rather stiff affair, in spite of the hospitable efforts of Professor and Mrs. Carleton. Fanny, looking very well in the blue linen and the Cluny lace collar, was very prim and silent. Isabel, in her white muslin, was shy and quiet. The homesick young man had attention only for Mrs. Carleton, who plied him with homemade dainties and strong coffee.

"*Les yeux de ma mère,*" he murmured with twitching lip, then burst abruptly into an avalanche of French, and subsided at last into his excellent laboured English. The Americans were very hospitable, he said, and already he admired them excessively, but France! ah, France—! He hoped he could stay on in Jefferson (Zhef-faire-soné, he called it), for it was a beautiful town, and he was already beginning to feel that he had *les amis* there.

Here he looked over at Isabel as if he had seen her for the first time, and let his eyes rest for a moment on her flushed and sympathetic face.

"He's conscious of my existence, at least," she

said to herself, enjoying her endive salad. She was interested in the good-looking stranger, but as yet he seemed very remote. She and Fanny found themselves quite ignored, except for a few correct exercise-book phrases about the weather, and the pleasures of a sea-voyage in June.

"We might just as well have worn our middies," whispered Fanny petulantly, as they were leaving the table.

"Well, you can never tell what these mysterious foreigners are thinking," whispered Isabel consolingly, in return.

After dinner, father had a consultation with the young man in the study, and when the guest had departed, Professor Carleton came up to Isabel's room to tell her the news.

"He would be very glad of a pupil or two until he gets a position, and you are to begin lessons the week after Commencement. It will be chiefly conversation, for the literature and the theory you can get in school, or by yourself. I feel sure you can enter an advanced French class in college if you study hard this summer."

"I will, father," Isabel replied, "and it's awfully good of you to go to this expense for me. There are so many other things that you could do with the money."

"Never mind that, little girl. I have those two commencement lectures to give, at LaCrosse and Winona, that I didn't expect to have. They'll help out; and anyway, I want you to have some advan-

tages, even if we can't do all we'd like to for you."

"Thank you, Best-Father-in-the-World," said Isabel, jumping up to give him a kiss. "Oh! your chin is all stubbly. It doesn't look it, but it is."

"Well, I shan't shave it till morning, not even for the privilege of kissing you," he answered, pinching her ear. "Now, let's see how soon you can become an accomplished linguist. I think Monsieur D'Albert will prove a skilful teacher."

"No telling what else he'll prove," interrupted Fanny from the door, where she had appeared in her pink kimono. Her father looked up perplexedly. "I think he's a count in disguise, and Isabel thinks he's a gentleman burglar," continued the pink apparition.

"He's neither," replied the professor, looking disturbed. "He's a well-meaning, simple young man, and you girls mustn't begin to get sentimental notions into your heads."

"Can't help it, daddy," said Fanny. "All girls do."

"I suppose that's true," Professor Carleton sighed. "Well, I leave it all to your mother." But he was heard to say, as he went slowly downstairs, "Dear me!"

CHAPTER XII

COMMENCEMENT

AND now Commencement Day was drawing alarmingly near. The final examinations were finished, and the essays had been learned and drilled. The girls had made their own graduation dresses, in their Domestic Arts classes — simple white gowns, with almost no trimming, models indeed of inexpensiveness and good taste. Isabel had fashioned hers swiftly and happily, for her fingers had an artistic gift, and she loved sewing seams, making dainty hems, and handling lengths of lace. Her grandmother had impressed her with the fact that being able to sew well was a ladylike accomplishment, and this thought was a double incentive in her work.

It was a regret to her that Grandmother Stuart's rheumatism, and Grandfather Stuart's busy season, prevented them from coming for Commencement. "It almost spoils it," she complained. "The only consolation is that I don't want them to see me disgrace the family by breaking down in my 'spiel,' as Rod calls it."

Even the arrival of attractive graduation gifts from relatives and friends failed to banish her secret apprehension. Every object, however, was a source of excitement and admiration to Fanny and Celia,

who shared the stimulation of the time, without the suffering.

On the morning before Commencement — the day of the class picnic — Isabel was in her room combing her hair, when the postman rang sharply, and presently Fanny and Celia came scrambling up the stairs with a small parcel.

"This one's from grandma, Fanny says," panted Celia, holding out the white box, neatly tied and stamped.

"Yes, it says *Dalton* on it," corroborated Fanny, snatching it back to look at it again.

"Get the scissors," cried Isabel, who with her hair down, was standing comb in hand, before the glass. "Here they are!"

Two snips of the scissors wielded vigorously by Fanny made short work of the string. The wrapping paper fell away, showing much tissue paper and plenty of pink ribbon; and then there were more tissue paper and a pink-flowered box. Inside, on white cotton, was the pink coral necklace that Isabel had worn to the fraternity dance, and that, long ago, had been Great-grandmother Isabel's. There lay the carved pink roses, with their twining gold stems and leaves, and pearls scattered here and there, like dew-drops. Isabel dropped the comb on the floor, and bent over the box, pale with delight.

"Oh, let me see! let me see!" begged Celia, pulling Fanny's hands and the box down to her own level. "Oh, they're pretty little doll-rosy-posies, aren't they?"

"Grandmother is a darling!" cried Isabel, turning from white to red. "How did she know that this would make me happier than anything else in the world?"

"But here's something more!" exclaimed Fanny, who had been fumbling in the cotton. She drew out a tiny parcel in tissue paper — a ten-dollar gold-piece from grandfather.

Isabel held it between her thumb and finger and looked at it. Oddly enough, her first thought was, "If I had had this, I could have bought the chrysoprase ring." And then came the quick reflection, "If I had bought the chrysoprase, I shouldn't have had the coral ring, and if I hadn't had that, I shouldn't have had the necklace!" At last she said aloud, "Everybody is far too good to me."

"Right you are!" responded Fanny cheerfully, taking the gold-piece, and tossing it in the palm of her hand. "I should think you'd be the happiest girl in the world."

"I should be," groaned the big sister, "if I didn't have that terrible 'piece' to speak. I'm getting scareder and scareder every minute."

And all that day, in spite of the gay time that the Seniors had at Picnic Point, Isabel felt a sinking somewhere in her stomach or her heart, when she thought of standing up before the Opera House full of people, and making a speech.

"If I didn't know anybody, it wouldn't be so horrible," she confided to sympathetic Molly, just before the picnic lunch, when she was feeling so ter-

rified that it seemed impossible for her to eat a bite. "It's awful to fail in front of your whole family and all your best friends." She wanted to add, "And Rod especially," but she didn't.

"Oh, you won't fail — no danger! Cheer up!" said Molly, who was enjoying the happy immunity that only moderate standings had brought her. "Here, have some of these chocolate-buds," she consoled, reaching into the pocket of her linen skirt. "Eric brought me some, but we ate nearly all of them up on the boat. You'll cover yourself with glory, Little One. In the bright lexicon of youth there is no such word as being scared to death."

"What! scared, Isabel?" queried Eric Thomas, coming up just then, his light hair ruffled in the wind, and his dark blue necktie blowing. He, too, had a speech to make, but he was taking it philosophically, in the provoking way that masculine creatures have.

"Well — a little," confessed Isabel, nervously jabbing a hat-pin into her last summer's Panama, which she held in her hand.

"Aw, let the crowd worry," protested Eric. "They'll suffer a lot more than we do!"

"I hope not," answered the very miserable little valedictorian. "I'd be sorry for them if they did."

"They need your sympathy," said Eric. "When in the dickens are we going to have lunch? I'm absolutely savage with starvation!"

But Isabel's apprehension seemed to grow worse instead of better. That night, after she had gone to bed, a wave of terror swept over her. She

seemed to see the audience, like the beast with the thousand eyes that she had read of in the Bible, all glaring at her, and paralysing her with their ferocious stare. And she imagined herself standing mute and shaking, her tongue stiff and her brain empty.

She sat up in bed, in the moonlight, wringing her hands. "Oh, I can't do it," she whispered —"I can't! I'll have to tell Mr. Stacy in the morning that I just can't. Mother'll have to telephone him. I don't care what he says —"

At that moment a figure appeared in the bar of moonlight that lay across the floor and the bed. It was Mrs. Carleton, in her long blue gown,— led by that instinct that mothers do not have to explain. She came over and sat down on the edge of the bed, and took Isabel's unsteady hand. "What is it, honey?" she asked tenderly.

The girl leaned her head on her mother's shoulder. "Oh, Mummy-Carl! I'm so frightened," she wailed. "I'm simply frightened stiff. I can't say my speech to-morrow, I really can't. Oh, I wish I never had said I would. I don't want to be valedictorian. I'd a lot rather some one else had it. It belonged to Eric anyway."

Mrs. Carleton did not say anything at first, but merely smoothed the twitching shoulder in the thin nightgown; and then she said quietly, "This is all foolishness. You'll go through it like mother's brave girl. Just think how proud we are all going to be, and how happy and glad you'll be, when it's

over! If you let yourself go to pieces when a little trial like this comes to you, you won't make very much of a success in life."

"I know I ought to be ashamed," murmured Isabel. "I suppose I *am* acting like a coward. But oh, it does seem so awful to have to speak before all those people!"

"But you've spoken at school, very successfully, and never felt quite like this."

"I've always been scared; and anyway, this is different. They don't expect so much of you at school."

"If it's different, it's the other way. At the Commencement exercises, everybody is just as sympathetic and tolerant as can be. Don't you remember how anxious we all were last year that Rodney should do his part well? It's the kindest sort of audience to speak before."

"Rodney did splendidly, didn't he? If I thought I could go through it like that —" Isabel sighed, and began to smooth back her hair.

"There's no reason why you can't. You must be willing to forget yourself. It's the '*exaggeration of the Ego,*' as father says, that makes us all self-conscious and nervous about other people's opinions. Just think about what you have to say, and forget how you're looking or acting."

"I'll try, mother, for I really do want to say something fine about William Morris, and I do feel what I've written about the good times we've had at school, and how sorry we are to give them up."

"Well, remember that, then, when you get up to speak. And remember, too"— she bent over to kiss her daughter's hot cheek —"that we're all loving you, and thinking *good* for you, every second. Doesn't that help?"

"I should say it does!" Isabel dropped back on her pillow with a long breath. "Somehow, I feel better, mother."

"You'll be as brave as a lion in the morning," responded Mrs. Carleton. "And now I'm going to stay with you till you go to sleep."

"That'll be too long, Old-Lady-who-lived-in-a-Shoe," said Isabel drowsily. But it was not many minutes until her regular breathing showed that she had forgotten her troubles; and Mrs. Carleton stole out of the room.

The next morning, Isabel's courage had come back. The exercises were to be at half-past ten, and so there was a good deal of hurrying in the house, and much running up and down stairs. Isabel had her breakfast in bed, with Fanny and Celia standing by as willing servitors, and Olga hovering about to see if anything more were wanted.

The egg was boiled to the exact point of creaminess, and the toast was the perfection of golden-brown; and the coffee was in a Spode cup that had been "in the family" for ever so long. Then the tray cloth was one of mother's choicest, and the napkin one of the best hand-embroidered set; and there was a pink rose lying on the tray beside the tumbler of water.

"This is the way I'd like to have breakfast every day," sighed the luxurious young lady, leaning back among the pillows, nibbling toast and sniffing the pink rose. "It almost pays for the agony I have to go through."

"I'm afraid you wouldn't have anyone to wait on you the rest of the year," said Fanny bluntly, leaning over the foot of the bed. "You haven't sisters enough to go round, and poor Olga has other fish to fry."

"Anyway I can get an idea of what it would be like," answered Isabel. And just then Celia came tearing in with the mail — three postcards and a letter and a parcel for Isabel.

Caroline Harper had sent the letter and the package — a pair of white silk stockings. "I'd love to see you graduate," she wrote, "but mother says it would be painful to me to be there, and I guess she's right. So I'm going to stay on here another week or two."

After she had read the letter, Isabel stared thoughtfully into the branches of the big maple outside her window. "I'm pretty sure," she said to herself, "that I'd rather be graduating with the class and not making a very great success of it than to be exiled altogether! Poor Caroline!" She folded the letter, and smoothed the silk hose with an affectionate touch.

"Better get up, Chick-a-Biddy," said Mrs. Carleton, coming into the room. And then, almost before she quite knew what was happening, Isabel was

dressed, and whirled away to the Opera House in the Lenners' automobile. The rest of the family were to come later.

It was very thrilling to be behind the scenes, though it was not entirely new, for the speakers had been there once or twice to drill, and " get the range " of the house, so that they might be heard. The girls were all in white, and the boys in blue serge coats and white duck trousers. The girls chattered incessantly of the presents they had received, and the boys stood around very stiffly, feeling of their neckties and making feeble jokes. Molly Ramsay kept everybody waiting, and then arrived calmly, eating the last of a roll of milk-chocolate wafers, because she had been too excited to eat breakfast. " I don't know why I *should* be so excited," she said, looking around at the group of anxious young people, " when I don't have to do anything but sit on the stage, and take somebody else's diploma when it's handed to me! " And then she whispered to Isabel, " I'm excited about you, Goldilocks — much more so than as if it were myself! "

" I'm all right," Isabel replied as cheerfully as possible. And then Mr. Stacy began to give orders in a subdued but worried tone, and they all marched out on the stage to the sound of clapping from the audience, and took their seats in two semicircular rows of chairs.

It was a long time before Isabel " found herself " sufficiently to distinguish anybody in the hall, but at last she discovered Fanny's red hair-ribbon and

Celia's blue dress; and then, of course, there were mother and father, trying to catch her eye, and further back there was Rodney looking at her very solemnly and trustfully.

"I'll have to think terribly hard about William," she thought, "for it won't do to get into a panic. I won't — I just won't — exaggerate the Ego."

And so she fixed her mind as best she could on the subject of her essay, and now and then she caught snatches of what Eric Thomas and Verna Schofield were saying — wondering how they could be so calm. There was some singing, too, that distracted her attention, and toward the last she even succeeded in looking about the theatre and noting what clothes her acquaintances had on.

"Mrs. Mitchell is wearing that lovely lavender silk," she thought. "It must be pretty warm — but then, it has lace sleeves. And Eileen Coye has a new pink dress — it looks like silk muslin — awfully sweet! And oh, dear, Fräulein Ewald has on that queer purple rig that she wore so much last year. I don't suppose she dreams how dreadful she looks in it."

And then she was aware that Mr. Stacy was reading from the programme, "*The Work of William Morris,* by Miss Isabel Carleton."

For a moment, a frightful sinking feeling kept Isabel in her chair. Her heart seemed to contract to the size of a hazel nut, and then to expand with throbs that shook her whole frame. She rose mechanically, and bowed to Mr. Stacy; she was not con-

scious of her body, but her mind seemed to float out toward the edge of the platform, where the mass of faces began. There was a kind of mist before her eyes, and she wondered vaguely whether she were trembling so that everybody would notice. Dreamily she sought and found the chalk-mark at the front of the stage, where Mr. Stacy had told them all to stand.

She did not know how attractive the girlish figure looked, poised uncertainly against the shadowy background of the stage. Her gown hung in simple folds, with a white fringed sash knotted at the side. Her low collar was edged with thread-lace, and she wore the pink coral necklace — her only touch of color except the flush in her cheeks. Her shining hair was in a coil on her neck. In all, she was a charming vision of sweet and unspoiled girlhood.

To her, however, nothing was of smaller consequence than her appearance. She could think of nothing but the rows of faces that stretched before her — miles and miles of faces, confused and indistinguishable, mere pink blotches with eyes. And she was suddenly and sharply conscious that she did not know what she was going to say. Her brain was empty, just as it had been in those prophetic minutes in bed, the night before. For an almost painful space she stood looking down mutely upon the audience. And then she found her mother's face, with the love and "thoughts of good" in it that had been promised her; and Rodney's, too, with its trustful gaze. She knew now that she could not

fail. Her dry lips opened, and the words came forth.

The essay seemed to be saying itself. The sentences that she had constructed with such careful thought now appeared never to have had any connection with her,— they were the words of a stranger. She knew that her lips were moving, but she was not at all sure what they were saying. To those listening, the youthful voice was full of conviction and expression, and an earnest belief seemed to enter into every line. Her father and mother turned to each other with eyes that said, "There! it's just as we thought it would be!" Fanny settled back in her seat drawing a long breath. Rodney Fox, following every word, sat upright with his arms folded, no muscle of his face relaxing. But he seemed to be looking beyond her, too, at something that was very far away.

Isabel went on speaking, easily, deliberately, never faltering nor giving any evidence of fear. To all appearances, she quite enjoyed delivering this message concerning a world-worker whom she admired much. Afterward, it seemed to her that she had been like an alarm clock that, once started, must perforce go on to the end of its clamour and clatter. "I don't believe I'd have stopped if the roof had fallen in," she was heard to say. "I should have gone on reeling off my little sing-song until the plaster smothered me."

However that may have been, she went on unerringly through every successive passage, and reached

the climax at the end with a strong voice and a show of emotion that made a vigorous conclusion to a well-sustained effort.

When she had finished, she paused for a moment before she began her valedictory address, and looked up in surprise when she heard the sound of clapping. She had been so absorbed — paralysed, she would have said — that she had wholly forgotten the possibility of applause.

Then she gave her speech of farewell to the students and the teachers. She had so far recovered herself that she knew every syllable that she was saying, and the real regret in her tone and in her words was as tangible to herself as to her listeners. Some of the girls on the platform were seen to dabble their eyes with their handkerchiefs, and some of the boys winked very hard and looked determinedly unconcerned.

At the end of the address, there was more clapping, and Isabel sank into her seat, with a vivid sense of exhaustion. But it was dispelled in a moment, when three bouquets were handed up to her. One was from the Lenners, and one from Fred Delafield and Evelyn Taylor, who had not been able to be present, because they were taking examinations at the University. The other, of pale pink roses, with sprays of fern, had an envelope attached to it, on which she recognised Rodney's handwriting.

"How lovely of Rod!" she thought. "He knows just what I like." She mechanically fingered the pink petals and the lacy fronds, while Mr. Stacy

was making his remarks that preceded the handing about of the diplomas.

A singing happiness hummed in her brain. It was over — all the work and the strain and the struggle. She was vibrating with joy and relief and gratitude, with the goodness of life and the exhilaration of success.

"How could I ever have thought things hard?" she whispered. "It was really nothing!" And she found Molly Ramsay squeezing her hand, and Eric Thomas on the other side making congratulatory jokes in an undertone.

Presently they had all risen, and Mr. Stacy was giving a stiff white roll to each,— and then people were crowding about and shaking hands, and chattering and praising the speakers, and giving the general effect of a very vivacious five-o'clock tea.

Fanny rushed up, with a red spot on each cheek, and her hair-ribbon askew. "Ugh! Isabel, I thought for a minute you were going to be scared," she gasped. "Oh! I just held onto the arms of my chair and *squirmed.*"

Celia put her arms around her sister's neck and whispered, "Oh, you looked so nice, Ducky-Bird,— and another present came just after you left, and what *do* you s'pose it is?"

"I can't guess! We'll open it as soon as I get home." And then Isabel turned to receive her mother's kiss, and her father's, "Not bad at all, little girl," which were the best of her rewards for hard work.

Mother and father were smiling and talking to Mr. Stacy and the other teachers, and saying, "Yes, of course we're proud of her;" "Thank you, it's good of you to say so;" "Yes, next year — college, of course;" "She doesn't quite know — French, perhaps;" "She'd like to go to Europe, but I hardly think she can."

Then Rodney came up, with his cheeks redder and his eyes brighter than ever. He gave her a long firm grasp of the hand, and cried, "Three cheers for the silver-tongued oratress of Jefferson! It was out of sight, Isabel. That's what I call *some spiel!*"

"Was it all right, Rod?" asked the girl anxiously, finding his praise very sweet.

"Absolutely A number one, all wool and a yard wide. Couldn't have been finer if Julia Marlowe had been saying it!"

"There's nothing like spreading it on thick," laughed Isabel; and then she said, "The roses are lovely, Rod, and I'm so happy to have them." She had peeped at the card in the envelope, and it only said, "Hearty congratulations and best wishes," but somehow it seemed to say more.

"They aren't lovely enough," said Rodney in a low tone; and added, lower still, "Nothing would be."

And Isabel, because she did not know what to answer, pretended not to have heard, and turned to speak to old Mr. Lenner, who had just come up to say how proud he was of his "young friend."

Then she and her mother went home in the Len-

ners' car, and the rest of the family and Rodney followed on foot; and there was an especially "sumptuous repast," as Fanny called it, that Olga had spent the forenoon in preparing, with fried chicken and green peas and strawberry shortcake,— and the bouquet of pink roses in the middle of the table.

"I feel like the heroine of a three-volume novel," sighed Isabel, sitting down to her dessert, after she had been called to the telephone for the third time during the meal. "It's wonderful to be the centre of things for one day at least. But I don't know that I could stand it indefinitely."

"You'll have to get used to it if you're going to be a famous 'lady-novelist,'" said her father with his eyes twinkling. "Rodney, did you know that we have with us to-day a not-very-far-in-the-future George Eliot, who is going to take the world by storm?"

"I've changed my mind," Isabel broke in. "The graduation essay has cured me of any literary ambitions, for a while anyway. I can think of thousands of other things I'd like to do."

"Nothing, of course, that won't make you famous," teased Professor Carleton. But Isabel took the banter of the family very good-naturedly, for the family seemed very good and precious to her just then.

In the afternoon, when Rodney had gone, and the new presents had been looked at, and some sort of quiet had settled on the house, Mrs. Carleton insisted on Isabel's going to her room to rest, while

Fanny guarded the telephone, and took any messages that might come over the wire.

And then, in the evening, there was the Senior Ball in the High School gymnasium. Rodney and Eric and Molly called for Isabel, and the gaiety never ceased till one o'clock, when they all came laughing and chattering back again. "I'm absolutely wilted," said Isabel to Molly, as they were saying good night, "but I've had a wonderful time, and it's been a day to remember!"

"Hasn't it!" said Molly wistfully. "Remember it a long, long time, Goldilocks, because —" she paused a little uncertainly.

"Why?" asked Isabel. She and Molly were in the vestibule and the boys were waiting outside.

"I don't know, exactly," Molly replied slowly, "but somehow I feel as if it were the end of things."

"Nonsense," Isabel smiled. "You're tired, Molly-kins. Why, things are going to go on just as beautifully as ever for four years more, at least. We'll both be in college next year."

"I'm not sure," said Molly with a catch in her voice. "Something — something —"

"It's something very silly then," insisted Isabel. "Run along, now, for you're worn out with dancing and getting diplomas. The boys are sure to be impatient."

Molly kissed Isabel and put her dark head against the bright one. "Anyway, I love you, Goldilocks," she said. "You won't forget that, will you?"

"Never!" responded Isabel, giving Molly a hug. "Good night, Calamity Jane!"

But the conversation had come back to her many times before the next seventeenth of June.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNREASONABLENESS OF RODNEY

THE first few days after Commencement were almost as busy as those before, for there were so many things to do that had been neglected. And then, Fred and Evelyn insisted on "just one or two more stunts"; and besides, there was the University Commencement Week. Isabel had never gone much to University affairs, except a lecture or a concert now and then, partly because she had been so busy with her own school circle, and partly because she was frankly not interested in what was taking place "on the Hill." But now things were beginning to be quite different. She went with Rodney, or with Fred and Evelyn and Rodney, to the Ivy-planting, and the Junior Play, and the Music School concert, and the Regatta, and the Commencement proper, at which the degrees were conferred. "She ought to go," Rodney said gravely to Mrs. Carleton, "so that she'll feel more as if she belonged to things next year."

But Mrs. Carleton had smiled and answered, "One never needs a reason, Rodney, for having a harmless good time," and the young man had looked puzzled, as if he scarcely knew whether he were being teased or not.

The French lessons were at first rather embar-

rassing to Isabel, for Monsieur D'Albert looked so very correct and inscrutable, and was so painfully polite that he made her feel very young and *gauche*. His bows, his quick placing of a chair for her, his nimble leap when she dropped her pencil or her handkerchief (which, out of sheer nervousness, she did with horrifying frequency) all made her self-conscious and abashed. Her mother always stayed in the next room with the door open, and Isabel therefore felt a sense of relief and companionship, but the first few lessons were something of a trial. Then after that came a growing interest and pleasure, and an increasing freedom in her use of French.

Now the excitement of the first part of the vacation had begun to wane. The University Commencement was over, and Fred and Evelyn had gone. Molly Ramsay was visiting in Evanston for a week or so, and Eric Thomas had gone on a camping trip. Caroline Harper had come home, and then in a few days had gone out to the Harpers' cottage on Lake Kegonsah. The Summer Session had begun, and father was giving one course — an eight o'clock — and writing away on his book the rest of the time. Mother was as much occupied with the house and the family as ever. Only Fanny and Celia seemed to lead the butterfly life of continuous leisure and fun.

Rodney had a cold; and a week of rain kept him indoors. The first bright day, however, he came over to ask Isabel to go for a walk along the lake road. In a few minutes they were enjoying the

breeze that blew from the lake, and the shade of the willows that overhung the path.

"Shall we sit down here?" said Rodney when they had reached an especially attractive spot where some boulders furnished comfortable seats near the water.

"I always like this place," answered Isabel.

A slight blue haze hung over the lake, where sailboats were skimming back and forth. Small slow waves dashed against the rocks, and, overhead, bitter-sweet and wild grape vines with pale green pendent clusters made a kind of natural bower.

"Great day," said Rodney, when they had seated themselves on the stones.

"I call it a heavenly afternoon," sighed Isabel, bending down to pluck a spray of spearmint.

"It's like poetry," Rodney replied, looking off across the lake to the other shore, where a group of white domes rose above the trees.

> "The splendour falls on castle walls,
> And snowy summits old in story,
> The long light shakes across the lakes,
> And the wild cataract leaps in glory."

There isn't any cataract, or any snowy summit, and the castle is only the State Hospital, but anyway, those lines seem to fit, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," said Isabel dreamily. "I think they're beautiful. They're from Tennyson, aren't they?"

"Yes; but do you know, one hardly dares confess

that he reads poetry. The fellows don't do it much, except a few on the sly. They seem to think it's silly and sissy-like."

"I don't see why they should," protested Isabel stoutly. "They aren't any better than the men who wrote it. I don't think even the college fellows would call Shakespeare a sissy, or Browning, or William Morris, or Tennyson."

"Well, anyway," answered Rodney, "the fellows sort of laugh at it; or if you read it they're good-natured and patronising about it. They say you're 'nutty on the sing-song,' or 'a good little Phi Bet' chaser,' or something like that. They don't seem to understand that a fellow can be a real man and like poetry too."

"It's queer, isn't it?"

"And the girls are hardly any better. If you quote poetry to 'em, they stare and wonder what you're talking about, or else they giggle and think you're getting sentimental. You never either stare or giggle. You're a good fellow, Isabel. That's why I like you. You're always ready for a good time, and you're never silly or loud."

"I'm glad you feel so, Rod," said Isabel simply. "If it's true, it's because mother and father brought me up that way."

"They're a mighty good sort, take it from me," said Rodney heartily.

The two young people were silent for a few minutes. Some fraternity men that Rodney knew passed in a canoe, and waved their paddles, grin-

ning. Isabel hardly noticed them, for she was absorbed in watching a wavering mauve streak on the water, with two sails shining yellow-white against it.

"You've done awfully well in your work this year, haven't you?" said Isabel at last.

"Pretty well. I've been a greasy grind in the privacy of my own room. But outside I've had a ripping good time. Oh, college is the place! A fellow meets older men there, and knocks about a little, and gets what's coming to him,— straight in the neck, maybe, but anyway he isn't coddled or wrapped up in cotton-wadding. Perhaps nobody would know it, but this has been a big year for me."

"Yes, you have grown older," meditated Isabel looking sidewise at the boy's face. She had not really noticed before how much more firm and settled and fine it had become. "Why, Rod looks like a really-truly young man," she thought —"and next year I'll be a young lady." And the same kind of perplexed exulting came over her that she had felt that day of the arbutus trip: the fearsomeness and the ecstasy of growing up.

"It takes a fellow a long time now-a-days to get ready to earn a living," Rodney was saying. "College for four years, and then perhaps graduate work for another year, and then two or three years to get where he can make anything."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that, is it?"

"Well, of course, he may begin to earn a little after he gets through college, but it's two or three years after that before he can save anything. A

fellow hates to be dependent on his father for anything more than college."

"Yes, a man ought to take care of himself after that," answered Isabel with decision, "and a woman, too."

Rodney started and looked up at her. "A woman? Why-y, yes, perhaps. I hadn't thought much about that."

"I'm going to do something for my living, too. I can hardly wait," Isabel remarked.

Rodney looked confused. "Oh, come, now, Isabel! You aren't planning it already?"

"Yes, I am. I'm going to be a wage-earner as soon as I can."

"What! not go out and work in a factory or something?" Rodney was alarmed at the word "wage-earner."

"No, I'm going on the stage —"

"Jiminy crickets! There's nothing slow about you."

"Or I'll do interior decorating —"

"A good cook's the best interior decorator that I know of," put in Rodney.

"Aren't you ashamed to make fun of me? Anyway, I'm going to teach French, if I can't do anything else. It sounds rather flat after talking about going on the stage," she laughed, "but teaching French is what I really expect to come to. I'm going to set about preparing myself — seriously, at once."

"But, Isabel, maybe you won't have to —"

"But I want to, Rod; it must be beautiful to be doing something in the world,— and to have your own money. I hate to take father's when he works so hard."

"That's what men are for — to work hard for the women they — care for." His boyish tongue stumbled at the word "love."

"Yes, it's all right for mother, but not for me,— after I'm old enough to earn anything for myself."

"Well,—" Rodney grew rather red —"perhaps by that time you'll have some one to earn money for you — as your father does for your mother."

"Oh," said Isabel thoughtfully, "you mean maybe I'll be married. Well, possibly, but I think it's better not to think about that now, while I'm so young."

"If you're too young to think about that, you're too young to think about the other — the wage-earning stuff," muttered Rodney.

"Oh, no, I'm not!"

The lake-steamer was passing, not far from shore, and they both stopped talking and watched it as it puffed along, with its paddle-wheel churning up the water. The sun caught the puffs of smoke and turned them into billows of gold.

"Father wants me to know French very well," Isabel resumed, after the boat had disappeared around a curve, "so that I can make use of it if need be. And I've made up my mind to work hard at it. Perhaps — sometime — before I'm grey-haired, I can go abroad and learn it more perfectly."

"I don't like that French tutor of yours," Rodney broke out almost angrily, as if he were giving vent to something that had worried him for some time. "He's too good to be true, with his bowing and scraping, and his little moustache, and lonesome-looking eyes, and his bland smile. I'll bet there's something queer about him."

"Why, Rodney Fox! Cousin Eunice sent us a letter about him, and he's *very* nice."

"How long had she known him?"

"Not very long, maybe; but she's a good judge of character. And anyway, it's easy to see that he's a gentleman."

"It isn't easy for me!"

"Perhaps you don't know one when you see him."

"Isabel!"

"Oh, Rod, I know that was horrid. But you're horrid, too, to say such mean things."

"I don't see why you should be so keen to defend a fellow that you don't know."

"I'll defend anybody that's attacked without reason."

"I haven't attacked him, and I have a reason."

"It can't be a very good one!"

"It's good enough —"

"You don't know anything about him."

"Neither do you!"

"Father wouldn't have allowed him to come to the house if he hadn't been all right."

"Your father's too busy to think much about those

things. Besides — he's a brick, but he trusts everybody."

"I'd rather trust everybody than suspect people that don't happen to please me."

"I think you're unkind, Isabel."

"And anyway," the girl went on, "mother always stays in the next room, when he's at the house."

"She'd better," muttered Rodney, flushing.

"Oh, dear, what a fuss about nothing!" cried Isabel; "and on such a lovely day."

"It isn't nothing," answered Rodney, "even if he is a cipher."

"I can't see what's the matter with you, Rod," sighed Isabel. "You've never been so unreasonable before."

"You never had a French tutor before." Rodney was fiercely breaking up bits of dry twigs and throwing them into the water. His lips showed a hard line, and he kept his eyes obstinately lowered.

They sat for some time in silence. The sunset grew more brilliant, and a red glow settled over the lake.

At last Isabel rose, saying decidedly, "I think I'd better go home."

"Just as you please," said Rodney, rising too.

They walked back over the stones, to the roadway, now in shadow. "Oh, dear!" thought Isabel, "how dreadful to have Rod so glum. I can't see what makes him act so foolishly."

Just then there was a rattle of wheels, followed by

a blare from an automobile horn, and Professor Mitchell's machine whirled around a curve in the road. Professor Mitchell was driving, and Mrs. Mitchell and Billy-Boy — a fat blue-eyed three-year-old — were on the back seat. Professor Mitchell brought the car to a standstill, with a great swirling of dust and throbbing of the engine.

"Hello, chicks!" he called heartily. "Want a ride? Or do you prefer to go on foot and enjoy each other's society?"

"We prefer to ride in grandeur," laughed Isabel. She was much relieved, for she was beginning to feel vexed at Rodney for his childishness. She didn't even notice that Professor Mitchell had used the undignified word "chicks," though it was rankling in Rodney's heart.

"You get in with Mrs. Mitchell and the Boss of the Family," the Professor went on, "and you jump in here with me, Rod." Rodney, after a slight hesitation, jumped in, and they spun away over the drive. Isabel, cuddling Billy-Boy, and talking with Mrs. Mitchell, whom she dearly loved, forgot, for the moment, the late unpleasantness with Rodney. When she saw him again, he acted as if nothing had happened; but from that time, Monsieur D'Albert had acquired a new interest. She wondered more about him, and began to feel that her very uncertainty was a source of fascination. And she began to like him better because he had been unjustly attacked.

CHAPTER XIV

GRANDFATHER'S DAY

ISABEL was hurriedly straightening up her room, after she had put on her dotted muslin dress, which Mrs. Hogan had "done up" freshly, only the day before. It was a clear forenoon in the early half of July, and the girl was feeling very happy and satisfied with the world. She was humming gaily to herself, and then she stopped humming to say, half-aloud, "They're sure to be perfect *dreams!*"

As she hung away in the closet the Japanese kimono, with its pink-and-white embroidered blossoms, and its gold dragons, that Aunt Felicia had sent her for Christmas, she caressed the folds with a loving hand. "How I do *adore* pretty things!" she thought. "When I get rich, I'll have all the frothy, frilly, ruffly, ribbony, lacy things I can possibly wear — and what I can't wear, I'll just sit and look at."

She went on swiftly with her work, but her mind was full of the wonderful opportunity that she was to have to-day. "I don't suppose I'll ever see such lovely clothes again till I go to Paris myself, and goodness knows when that will be!" she said dreamily, standing for a moment with her hair-brush in her

hand, and looking off into the boughs of the maple outside her window. She did not see the leaves trembling in the wind, but rooms and cases full of Parisian furbelows, and all the delicate, charming bits of apparel that girls of seventeen — and some older ones — have a passion for.

Caroline Harper's aunt was visiting in Jefferson, on her way home from Paris, where she had been studying art. She was young and rich and attractive — and she was going to be married. She had bought her trousseau in Paris. Caroline had persuaded her to let a few of the girls in the neighbourhood come to see the things. It was the first time that Caroline had asked the girls to her house since she had returned from Kentucky. "Oh, my dear!" she had said over the telephone, "you can't imagine how exquisite they are. They're simply wonderful. And the gowns — well, you'll have to see them to understand."

The girls were to have luncheon in the arbour with the red rambler climbing over it, and then Aunt Imogene was to show them her Parisian finery, and talk to them about being an art student abroad.

Isabel was anticipating all this, as she stood gazing through and beyond the boughs of the maple. At last she came to herself, glancing at the clock, for she was getting impatient to go. She put the hair-brush away, looked hastily about the room, to see that everything was right, and then ran singing downstairs.

"La-la! La-la!" trilled Isabel — and stopped

at the foot of the stairs, just as a handsome, white-haired old man stepped up on the porch. With a cry of delight, she unfastened the screen door, and threw her arms around the old man's neck. "Grandfather!" she exclaimed, "what a surprising person you are!"

"I just took it into my head to run in for the day," laughed grandfather, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. "Where are all the family?"

Isabel's heart sank; she turned cold in spite of the sunshine. "They're all away, grandfather," she said, trying to speak naturally; "there's no one here but me — and Olga, of course."

"What! all away?"

"Yes. Father and mother and Celia went up to Blatchford. They just started a little while ago. Mother and Celia are going to stay two days, but father's coming back on the 11:02 this evening."

"And Fanny?"

"She's spending the day with the Mitchells across the lake."

"Dear, dear!" said grandfather. "And this is the only day I could really spare. Haying begins to-morrow." The overseeing of the work on his big stock-farm kept Mr. Stuart very busy during the summer.

"They'll all be terribly disappointed not to see you," returned Isabel. "You don't come very often." As she talked, she was wondering what she should do.

"Well, I'm sorry," said grandfather, nonplussed for a moment; "but I don't object to your company a bit."

Isabel's laugh was a trifle strained. "Come in and sit down," she said, leading the way to the sitting-room, where she pulled forward the mahogany chair that had been grandfather's mother's. Mr. Stuart leaned back restfully, and Isabel took his hat.

"Will you get me a drink of water, child?" he asked. "I walked up from the station, and the sun really *is* warm."

"Oh, there's lemonade in the ice-box," said Isabel, who was thinking very hard. "I'll get you some."

She ran lightly enough through the dining-room, but she stopped in the little entry between that room and the kitchen. Leaning against the wall, she stifled a sob, and two hot tears ran down her cheeks. "I can't give it up," she whispered —"seeing all the beautiful Paris things that I'm simply mad over!"

Grandfather was here for the whole day; his train did not go till eight in the evening. "What shall I do?" Isabel questioned herself, in the dusk of the entry-way. But she wiped the tears, and went out into the kitchen where Olga was ironing table-cloths. "Mr. Stuart is here, Olga," she said, trying to speak in a natural tone. "We'll have to have lunch for him after a while." She had told Olga that she was going to be out, and that there would be no luncheon to get.

"Yes, Miss Isabel," said the good-natured Swedish girl, without looking up from her work.

Isabel stood with her hand on the ice-box door. She was thinking, "I don't believe grandfather'll mind if I ask him to sit on the porch and read the magazines. Old people don't care much about having a good time. They *like* just sitting still."

She took out the pitcher of lemonade, and brought a glass and a tray from the pantry. "It will be all right," she decided. "I'll tell him that he'll have to entertain himself."

She put the full glass on the tray, and returned the big pitcher to the ice-box. Then she stood still again. "Perhaps it would be mean," she hesitated. "Grandfather does a great many things for us." And then she went on thinking, "I ought to do some sort of penance, I suppose, for being so detestable about Fanny's losing my ring, and the other times that I've been inconsiderate and unkind." But this made her indignant with herself. "The idea of calling your own grandfather a penance, Isabel Carleton," she murmured. "You ought to be dreadfully ashamed!"

Her face grew clear again. She took the lemonade to Mr. Stuart, who was glancing at the headlines of the Chicago daily that lay on the table. "I'm sorry to have been so slow, grandfather," she smiled. "Will you excuse me a minute, while I telephone?"

She shut the door into the telephone-closet, so that

her grandfather might not hear. There was a sob in her throat when she asked for the number, but when Caroline came to the telephone, her voice was steady. "I'm awfully sorry," she said, when she had explained; "but you see how it is."

"Oh, dear! It's a shame!" shrilled Caroline over the wire. "You don't know what you're missing. I'd ask you for some other time, but Aunt Imogene has to begin packing just as soon as the girls leave."

"I hope you haven't anything else to do?" asked grandfather anxiously, when she came back to the sitting-room. He had noticed for the first time a kind of "party" freshness about the girl's white frock. "Old people are always upsetting young people's plans."

"No, I haven't a thing, grandfather," said Isabel, coming to stand beside his chair. "And I've thought of something that perhaps you'll like to do. They've just put in a new exhibit at the Historical Museum. Father says that there's a wonderful lot of letters and documents and relics of the Civil War; he was just saying yesterday how much you'd enjoy seeing them. We could go up there for a while, before lunch."

Mr. Stuart assented delightedly. He had been in the War himself, as a young lad, toward the close of the Rebellion.

They had not far to go to the Museum. Grandfather pored over the yellowed clippings and the faded scrawls in the glass cases, stopping now and

then to explain something about one of them, or to relate an incident of camp life. All at once he uttered an exclamation.

"Why, here's a letter from Jim Challice," he cried. "Well! well! Jim Challice, of all things! He was in my Company — we fought in the battle of Cold Harbor together." The old man was flushed with excitement. "Read it, Isabel," he urged eagerly. "Your eyes are better than mine."

Isabel was excited too. "It was written just before that battle, I think," she said, running through the letter. "It says something about Sam Stuart. Was that really you, grandpa?"

"Yes, yes! Of course!" cried grandfather. "Who else? Dear me! Those were thrilling times." They bent over the case together. "I lost all track of Jim," Mr. Stuart went on. "He was wounded and sent home, and then his people moved away, and I went to Iowa myself. I heard he had gone to Australia — and then I never could find out anything more about him."

"His daughter gave this group of letters," said Isabel, who had been reading the labels on the papers. "'Donated by Mrs. Alonzo Hale, daughter of James Challice, Elwood, Minnesota.' Why, grandfather, here's a clipping that tells about him. He's living with his daughter. You can go to see him — it isn't very far!"

They lingered for some time, reading the letters carefully, and verifying the incidents from grandfather's excellent memory. All the way home and

at luncheon, they were talking of the happy discovery that they had made. Olga had set the table on the screened side-porch, which was shaded with vines; and there were escalloped potatoes, and cold roast ham, and salad, and hot roll-jelly-cake.

"I remember Master Stuart like yelly-cake," said Olga modestly, "and my fire was goin', so I yoost make a little." Grandfather was pleased and grateful when he discovered this thoughtful attention.

After luncheon, Isabel showed her grandfather her new kodak-book, and they inspected the garden in the back yard, and Mr. Stuart explained very specifically how to get rid of the worms on the rose-bushes. Then Isabel said suddenly, "I think it would be fun to take a ride around the lake, don't you, Daddy-Long-Legs?"

And again the old man was only too happy to go. The little steamer was never crowded at this time of day, and they had good seats under the red-and-white awning. The breeze was cool, though the heat made the air quiver above the blue-green water. The shore in the distance was hazy and irregular, and above the trees rose the domes of the old State Hospital, that always looked so much more picturesque than they really were.

"It's simply fine to have you here," said Isabel, squeezing her grandfather's hand. "I love to go out skylarking with you." The look of affection and pleasure that the old man turned upon her was a compensation for the sight of any number of Paris marvels in silk and linen. "I don't care," said the

girl to herself, "the flummeries aren't worth hurting anybody's feelings for."

The trip took two hours and a half, but there was always something to see. The shores were lined with summer cottages, and people kept getting on and off, dragging queer bundles and saying funny things. At one little booth on the water's edge, the boat stayed long enough for the two voyagers to eat some ice-cream. Grandfather was in great spirits, and told amusing stories about the calves and the young pigs; and the odd manners of the neighbours, and the way grandmother got on with the strangely behaved new "hired girl," Melissy.

The time went so speedily that they were surprised when they found themselves back at the pier from which they had started. But, once more at home, they were glad to sit on the porch and rest.

Then Isabel had an inspiration. "I know what I'm going to do," she cried, jumping up. "I'm going to ask Professor Lenner's father in for dinner. You'll just love him, Grandpa Stuart. He's so jolly, and he tells the funniest stories. You know the Lenners live just behind us, on the other side of the block." She ran to the telephone, to give the invitation, which old Mr. Lenner accepted on the spot.

Isabel had a bowl of red peonies on the table, and the candles with red shades; and there were funny Japanese favours, left over from father's birthday, and some verses that Isabel had scribbled while she was combing her hair before dinner.

Olga had baked a fresh white-fish — which grandfather couldn't get every day, since he lived so far in the country — and there was a cream pie with meringue on top.

The two old men became the best of friends at once. Mr. Lenner told his wittiest tales, and grandfather capped them with hilarious anecdotes of the time when he was a State Senator in Iowa. To Isabel, serving the fish and pouring the coffee, the group seemed very festive indeed, and she felt something of the satisfaction of the young hostess who sees her first dinner-party turning out a success.

Isabel went to the station with grandfather for the eight o'clock train: She could come back quickly and safely in the trolley. They had a few minutes to wait at the station, and they stood out on the platform in the glow of the arc lights. "I've had a 'perfectly scrumptious' time, as you girls say," said Mr. Stuart; "and now I'm going to tell you something: I haven't been feeling very well lately, and I got wretchedly tired of looking after the farm all day, and then just sitting on the porch and reading magazines. I didn't know what was the matter with me. I told your grandmother about it this morning, and she said, 'Why, Samuel Stuart, what you want is a good time!' And she bundled me right off to the train." He laughed his clear, happy laugh that Isabel had always liked to hear. "And I guess she was right," he added. "I feel a thousand per cent. better. Old people need their good times just as much as young folks, I believe — more,

"It was lovely of you to come," she said feelingly, "and it has been beautiful to have you so much to myself." Page 201.

too, perhaps, because they haven't so many years to have a good time *in*." There was a kind of sadness in the happy light in grandfather's eyes.

Isabel's heart contracted with a quick pain. "Oh!" she thought to herself, with a mixture of horror and thankfulness, "what if I *had* asked grandfather to sit on the porch and read the magazines! Oh, how dreadful!"

The train was gliding into the station, and she kissed her grandfather, with tears in her eyes. "It was lovely of you to come," she said feelingly, "and it's been beautiful to have you so much to myself."

Mr. Stuart kissed her, and jumped to the car-step like a boy. He waved his straw hat to her, as the train steamed away into the dusk.

The next day, Caroline Harper stopped on the porch for a minute on her way down town. "You certainly missed something yesterday, Isabel," she said. "The girls were in raptures over the things; and we had a perfectly grand time."

"So did I," answered Isabel.

Caroline looked up quickly. "Why, I thought you said your grandfather was visiting you," she said.

"He was," Isabel responded.

"Then I don't see how you could have a very good time," commented Caroline, taking up the pink parasol that Aunt Imogene had given her.

"Well, I can't explain," said Isabel quietly.

CHAPTER XV

LOSINGS AND FINDINGS

"HELLO!" said a small voice from the piazza.

"Hello!" answered Isabel running to the door. "Oh, here's our nice Billy-Boy!" she exclaimed. "How are you this morning, Mr. William Mitchell?"

"Pwitty well," responded the child gravely. He wore a blue "Oliver Twist" suit, with short white stockings. His hair, like straw-coloured silk, was ruffled in the wind, and his cheeks were flushed with romping. "Muvver says come in few-few minutes," he vouchsafed, looking up solemnly at Isabel. He had a red Japanese box in his hands, and he was slipping the cover up and down ecstatically.

"Come right in, honey-love, and give me a good hug," said Isabel, opening the screen door and catching the child up in her arms. He put his arms around her neck and kissed her, for he and "Yiz-buh," as he called her, were the best of friends.

"Few-few minutes," he gurgled, as if the phrase pleased him.

"Want cooky?" asked Isabel, gazing lovingly into the big blue eyes. "Billy-Boy want cooky?"

"Um-huh!"

"I'll ask Billy-Boy's muvver. Get on my shoulders, and I'll be horsey." She put him on her back, where he clung shrieking with delight, while she pranced and neighed her way to the telephone.

Mrs. Mitchell gave consent, and soon the little lad was settled contentedly on the sofa in the sitting-room, nibbling a cooky, and placidly scattering crumbs on the rugs. He had put his lacquered box on the mahogany table near the sofa.

"Now Billy-Boy sit still, little-little while," coaxed Isabel. "Horsey has to go up stairs."

"Um-huh!" Billy nodded beatifically, munching the cooky.

It was nearly time for the French lesson, and Isabel wanted to change her shoes and tuck up some straggling locks. Somehow she always wished to look her best for Monsieur. She hurried up stairs, and dashed back again as quickly as she could. On her return, the cooky was gone, and Billy-Boy was sitting stolidly on the sofa, holding the box in his small smeary hands.

"Billy-Boy go home now," he announced, raising his eyes to Isabel's. "Show muvver. Pwitty."

"All right, sweetheart," assented Isabel; "Billy-Boy go now. Come again soon. Kiss me! Come again!"

With a hurried peck on her cheek, the child was off, swaying unsteadily down the steps, and cuddling his red box.

Just as Billy-Boy reached the gate, Monsieur ar-

rived. His foreign-looking clothes, though far from new, were neat and spotless, his hat was jaunty, his tie sober and correct, his moustache very trim. Isabel stood looking at him dreamily, without speaking.

"*Bon jour, Mademoiselle!*"

"*Bon jour, Monsieur,*" the girl answered, starting.

"*Il fait beau temps, n'est ce pas?*"

"*Mais oui, Monsieur!*"

He came in, and they sat down at the table in the sitting room. Isabel was thinking how gentle and serious his eyes were, and how his teeth flashed when he smiled, which was not often.

Mrs. Carleton was detained up stairs with an importunate dressmaker; but now Isabel did not in the least mind being alone with Monsieur. The lesson began, and had just got under way, when Celia was heard crying loudly in the kitchen.

"*Pardonnez-moi,*" interrupted Isabel, and hurried to the kitchen, where she found Olga picking up the fragments of a favourite doll's teapot, which Celia had been carrying to a dolls' picnic in the back yard. "Oh, I thought she was hurt," said Isabel, consoling Celia at the same time with pats and kisses. "Never mind! Sister'll get you another one when she goes down town. Use this nice little pitcher, and make lemonade. The dolls'll be just as well pleased."

Celia, pacified by the privilege of squeezing the lemon, wiped her tears, and Isabel returned to her

lesson. She explained to Monsieur the nature of the accident.

"*Quel dommage!*" His brown eyes expressed amiable grief.

All the time that he was drilling her in her irregular verbs, she was thinking how very good looking he was, "just a trifle sad — and so appealing!" Unconsciously she began contrasting him with Rodney Fox. Beside him Rodney seemed very young and outspoken, and lacking in the graces of the man of the world. Rodney was healthy and fresh-faced and frank-eyed, and Monsieur was pale and interesting and reserved. One knew all about Rodney — there was nothing mysterious nor romantic about him. He was *nice* — oh, *ever* so nice — except when he got cross and unreasonable about things that didn't concern him. But this man was perplexing and fascinating; he had seen so many strange foreign things, and known so many odd foreign people — and who knew what he was thinking, behind all that punctilious politeness of his?

Isabel stumbled on the verbs. Monsieur corrected her gently.

"How can you be so patient with my stupidity?" she exclaimed.

"That is what I am here for, Mademoiselle."

He didn't even deny that she was stupid! Somehow, he was, for all his mystery, so honest, so mild and courteous, that she felt herself liking him very much, and hoping vaguely that he liked her.

They talked about a French story that she was

reading, and while they were conversing he looked into her eyes so steadily that she felt her colour rising in spite of herself.

Presently the hour was over, and he was gathering up his books to go; Olga came into the room to say, "Your mother wants to see you a minute, Miss Isabel, and she says the yentleman wait."

Isabel ran up stairs. Her mother was standing before a long glass and the seamstress was pinning up the hem of a skirt.

"Ask Monsieur to come for tea on Thursday," Mrs. Carleton said hurriedly. "I'm having some French Department people in. It may help him to get his position."

"Yes, mother," and Isabel ran lightly down stairs again.

The young man flushed, his teeth gleaming while he reiterated, "*Merci,* Mademoiselle — tell your mother *merci beaucoup.*" And then in a moment he was gone.

Isabel, sitting on the sofa, thinking about him, was rather irritated when she heard Rodney Fox's whistle — their old high-school signal — from the gate. Imagine Monsieur D'Albert whistling at one in that childish way!

She went very slowly to let Rodney in. He sat down, frowning gloomily. "I saw that French fop coming down the street with his books under his arm," he said. "I suppose you've been having a lesson."

"Yes, I have," Isabel replied briefly.

A silence. Rodney's frown deepened.

"Is your mother in?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes. She's been upstairs all the morning with the dressmaker." The girl took a kind of spiteful pleasure in saying this.

"Oh!" said Rodney shortly.

There was silence again.

Isabel, idly wondering what there was to say next, let her eyes wander to a blue pottery bowl on the table, that had not yet been filled with flowers. She remembered putting something into the bowl a while before. She started up with an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Rodney.

"Oh, my coral necklace!" she cried.

"What about it?"

"Oh, my necklace — the one that grandmother gave me for Commencement!"

"Well, what's the matter? What's happened to it?"

"It's gone. I put it into this bowl this morning. I was going to show father that the clasp was loose, and that it ought to be repaired — and some one called me, and I put it in there."

"Now it's gone?" Rodney peered into the bowl, as if he expected to see the necklace there, in spite of its disappearance.

"Yes. Where *could* it have gone to?"

"You're sure you didn't take it out?"

"Of course, I'm perfectly sure."

"Perhaps your mother did."

"No; she hasn't been down stairs since."

"Or Fanny —"

"She stayed at Anna Paul's last night, and hasn't come home yet."

"Olga might —"

"She's been in the kitchen all the morning."

They looked perplexedly at each other. Isabel's lip trembled. "Oh!" she gasped, "I hope it isn't lost!"

And then the same thought struck both of them at once. It was Rodney who spoke: "Was that Frenchman in here alone?"

"Y-yes," stammered Isabel. "But oh, Rod, you can't suspect him. He's so nice and polite!"

"Politeness doesn't prevent some other things."

"Oh, but I couldn't — oh, no!" Isabel was horrified.

"I could. You say he was here alone. When?"

"Well, let me see. Celia broke her doll's teapot, and I went out to the kitchen for a moment. And then mother sent for me to come up stairs, but I was only gone a minute or two."

"It wouldn't take more than a second —"

"But, Rodney, he wouldn't — it's too awful. Oh, dear! what a time I have with my jewels," she laughed with tears in her eyes. "I no more than succeed in getting something than it is spirited away."

"Might be pretty substantial spirits."

"But I tell you, he wouldn't do such a thing!"

"How do you know? *I* never liked him anyway."

"I know you didn't. You always wanted to find out something dreadful about him."

"It's no such thing; but you can see for yourself that it looks rather bad for him."

"I won't believe it, Rodney Fox!"

Just then Mrs. Carleton came into the room. She stopped, and looked inquiringly at the two young people. "What! Quarreling?" she said, amazed. Rodney and Isabel never spoke to each other in such tones.

"Oh, mother," Isabel burst out, "Rodney thinks that Monsieur D'Albert has stolen it!"

"*Stolen!* What?"

"My necklace. It's gone. It was here in the bowl,— you didn't take it out, did you?"

"No. But perhaps Olga did."

"Ask her, mother."

But Olga knew nothing about the necklace.

"It's very queer," said Mrs. Carleton, with a line between her eyebrows. "Didn't you put it somewhere else, Isabel?"

"Why, I'm sure I didn't, mother."

"Oh, well, it will turn up," said Mrs. Carleton, her face clearing. "There's no use in worrying about it."

"Somebody's taken it," said Isabel with conviction. "You know it was quite valuable, mother, because it's so old, and because it has all that beau-

tiful carving and the pearls —" Her voice broke, and she wiped her eyes. The necklace had never seemed so lovely before.

" Probably he's hard up," said Rodney.

" He sat right there by the table," admitted Isabel wretchedly.

" Well, well," repeated Mrs. Carleton, " we shall have to wait and see what happens. There's no doubt a good reason for it's not being here. It may be that your father can solve the mystery."

Rodney went away, looking, as Isabel hysterically asserted, like a moving-picture Sherlock. Mrs. Carleton returned to the dressmaker, and Isabel wandered about the house, peeping into all sorts of nooks and crannies, hunting for the lost ornament. " I thought my troubles were over when I got my ring back," she groaned. " But I do believe that thinking about one trouble brings on another."

Professor Carleton, coming home late for lunch, knew nothing of the whereabouts of the necklace. " But we can't accuse any gentleman of taking it," he said, looking shocked at the mention of Monsieur D'Albert's name. " Really, that's out of the question."

But the necklace did not appear, either on that day or the next.

" Mother, it does look as if he might have taken it, doesn't it? " said Isabel in a low tone, as she and Mrs. Carleton were spreading sandwiches for the tea on Thursday. " I suppose he's very poor — he as good as told you so — and perhaps he was in

need of money, and he saw the thing there in the bowl.— It was my fault as much as his, for leaving it there."

"It does seem to be against him," murmured Mrs. Carleton, setting out the green Sedji cups, and getting a plate for the sandwiches. "I really don't feel that I can face the man, suspecting him of such a thing."

"It is hard, isn't it?"

"And of course, if he did do it," Mrs. Carleton went on, with a hurt puzzled look in her eyes, "he ought not to be taken into the French Department. I am afraid that we shall have to tell Professor Rambeau."

"Oh, dear. Could you do *that?* Monsieur seems so awfully *nice,* mother," said Isabel for the twentieth time.

"Yes, dear, but you never can tell," replied Mrs. Carleton wearily.

She and Isabel went on, without saying anything, getting out the tea-napkins, and putting the iced cakes into the wicker basket, and filling the sugar-bowl and the cream pitcher.

Suddenly they heard the screen door slam, and looked up in surprise to see Mrs. Mitchell coming bareheaded through the hall. She had dashed in excitedly without stopping to ring. Her plump face was pale and her curling brown hair slightly disheveled.

"Oh, Mrs. Carleton, I'm so sorry!" she cried.

"Sorry? Why?" Mrs. Carleton stood with a

bunch of tea-spoons in her hand, and Isabel set the cream pitcher down very hard on the table.

"About Billy-Boy. Why didn't you tell me you had missed it?"

"Missed what?"

"Isabel's necklace. I didn't discover it till this minute. Billy-Boy had it in his red box. He must have taken it when he was over here on Tuesday. Where was it?"

Isabel, with a very red face, was staring at her mother. "It was on the table, in the blue bowl," she said slowly. "Oh, Mummy, I forgot about Billy-Boy's being here!"

"He put the box down when he came in, because Hally Comstock was there with her dog. And Mary set the box on a shelf, and we never found what was in it till just now."

"Oh-h!" Mrs. Carleton and Isabel both gave sighs of relief.

"Of course you must have missed it?"

"Yes, but —"

"I *hope* you didn't suspect any of your friends!"

"Well — we scarcely knew what to think."

"I'm as sorry as I can be," groaned Mrs. Mitchell. "What shall I do with my bad boy?"

"Give him a kiss for us," laughed Isabel. "He's the dearest thing I know."

"It's all right, Mrs. Mitchell," said Mrs. Carleton. "We're perfectly happy about it."

"I must go now," said Mrs. Mitchell, laying the

necklace down on the table. "I was just dressing for a trip in the car. Do forgive the muddling Mitchells, won't you?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Isabel and her mother together.

When the caller had gone, they looked at each other with mixed expressions. "Oh, mother! I'm so ashamed!" said Isabel.

"So am I," answered Mrs. Carleton. "I'm humiliated to death."

"We ought to have *known* he wouldn't."

"We did know it, really, but we let our judgment be overruled by the looks of things."

"What if we *had* told Professor Rambeau!"

"I can only thank Heaven that we didn't."

Isabel took up the necklace, and pressed it to her cheek lovingly. "Oh, I'm so glad you've come back!" she whispered. "And now," she said aloud, "I'm going to telephone to Rod Fox. He was the one that put the idea into my head at first. He wanted Monsieur to be guilty."

"Oh, Rod!" she exclaimed, when she had told Rodney about Billy-Boy, "I think we were horrible to entertain such thoughts for a minute."

"I don't mind saying that I'm terribly ashamed," said Rodney. "I've been feeling like a sneak ever since,— as badly as if I'd stolen the thing myself. I was just — well, you know, Isabel, I rather thought that — that you — that he — I don't know what was the matter with me. I was just plain fool, I guess!"

"We all were. Even mother was guilty of suspecting him."

"I feel as if I ought to apologise to him," said Rodney.

"Oh, mercy, no! That would be too awful. He must never know what shocking things we thought about him. But I'll see that he has an extra helping of cake this afternoon. The guests'll be arriving in a minute. I must go."

Monsieur D'Albert, with his quiet assurance, his perfect accent, and his faultless manners, quite won the heart of Professor Rambeau.

On Friday, when Monsieur came for the lesson, his teeth were flashing in smiles. "I must tell Madame and Mademoiselle," he said, "that Professor Rambeau has engaged me for teaching French this autumn in the University."

"We're very, very happy to hear it, Monsieur," Mrs. Carleton replied heartily.

"Indeed we are!" echoed Isabel.

"And," said the young man shyly, "I have cabled my *fiancée*. We had it arranged — if I could find a place, she was to come over. We shall be married in September."

"That's very beautiful, Monsieur," said Mrs. Carleton. "We rejoice in your good fortune."

"*Beaucoup de felicitations!*" stammered Isabel, whose cheeks had grown very red.

"*Merci, Madame et Mademoiselle,*" replied Monsieur D'Albert bowing. "And now we shall begin the lesson, shall we not?"

All through the lesson, Isabel was thinking, "How glad I am that I wasn't silly enough to fall in love with him!" And a voice away down in her heart piped up tauntingly, "Aha, miss! you had a pretty close shave!"

CHAPTER XVI

A TRIP TO THE FARM

PROFESSOR Carleton put the ticket into Isabel's hand. "Now, everything is attended to," he said, "and all you have to do is to enjoy the scenery till you get to Dalton. Here's your magazine. And don't lose your ticket."

Isabel laughed. "I'll cling to it like mad," she assured him. "But you know, Popsey Professor, I'm not six years old any more!" Indeed, she looked very much the young lady in her suit of coarse blue linen, and her white hat with its wreath of blue corn-flowers.

"I never can remember that you aren't a little girl," sighed Professor Carleton with a guilty look. "It doesn't seem so very long since I was carrying you around on my arm."

"You'd have some difficulty in doing it now," said the girl. "Oh, there's the train whistling, away down the track."

"Give our regards to grandmother and grandfather, and tell them we'll be out before long."

"Yes, yes! I'm saving a good hug for each of them. And here comes my chariot of fire, or my fiery dragon, rather."

The train came panting up to the platform. It always seemed to Isabel like some live creature raging through the country, blustering and hooting, and trying to make itself out a great deal worse than it was.

She had never been allowed to travel much alone, but the journey out to Dalton was only an hour's ride, and she was sure to be quite safe. Her father kissed her, and helped her up the steps. As the train moved out of the station, she waved her hand to the gentleman of forty-five who stood on the platform with his hat raised.

"Father's always so polite and dear," said Isabel to herself. "He raises his hat to me as if I were a duchess!"

She arranged her handbag and her magazine on the seat, but she was too much interested to read. In front of her was a country bride in bright blue silk and a very lacy hat with violently pink roses on it. The bride giggled as a shower of rice fell from her hat to the floor. The bridegroom, in stiff clothes and a red necktie, looked very uncomfortable. He was smiling sheepishly, and his face was covered with perspiration.

A little girl of four, across the aisle, was whining, and being scolded by her mother, who had a fretful baby in her arms. The little girl's lip was quivering, and she put her face down on the seat, muttering rebelliously.

Isabel wondered what she ought to do. "I suppose the poor child is tired and cross," she said.

She looked out of the window at the scattered houses and the yellow stubble of the wheat-fields. There were bits of home life divertingly visible when the train passed a farm or a village: two children playing with a shaggy dog; a fluffy grey kitten sitting on a fence-post, staring at the train; an old lady plucking a white duck in a grape-arbour; three farmers trying to pull a cow out of a mirehole, near a lake. "It's just like seeing pictures in a gallery, only so much more interesting," thought the young traveller.

She turned again to the child across the aisle, who was dirty and forlorn-looking. Isabel leaned forward into the aisle. "Mayn't she come and sit with me?" she asked.

The woman looked up crossly, but when she met the frank grey eyes under the corn-flowers, her face softened. "She's a bad girl, that's what she is," she said sharply. "She ought to see that I have all I can do to keep this young one from squalling. I tell her I'll give her a good smack if she don't behave."

Isabel smiled. A "smack" to her had always been a kiss — nothing so very bad from one's mother. She held out her hand to the little girl. "Come and look out of my window," she coaxed. "There are ever so many nice things over here."

"She's too dirty, I'm afraid," protested the mother. "I scold her for not keeping herself clean, but it's no use."

"I'm sure, when I was her age, I didn't keep

clean, either," Isabel answered. "I'll wash her face, if she'll let me." She took a clean handkerchief from her bag, wet it at the faucet, and wiped the smudgy face. Then she wrapped the damp handkerchief in a leaf torn from the magazine, and put it back into her bag. "There now!" she exclaimed, "you look as nice as can be."

The child was really very pretty now that the soil of travel and the frown of naughtiness had disappeared. Isabel found one of Olga's lemon-cookies for her, and the child rode contentedly at the window, crowing with delight at the scenes that Isabel pointed out to her.

There was a mother-pig in a pasture, with a row of baby pigs running after her; and a flock of sheep, too; and a boy fishing, with a lunch-basket beside him; a group of children waving at the train from the top of a low wood-shed; and a horse afraid of the train, shying and snorting as the monster passed, while the owner of the beast held the bridle, and a frightened woman clung to the seat of the carriage.

At the country stations, people got on and off, and children being dragged up the aisle stared at the little girl on Isabel's lap. There was no lack of interest or amusement, and it seemed a strangely short time before the brakeman was calling, "Dalton the next station! Don't forget your umbrellas and parcels!"

Isabel took the little girl back to her mother. The baby had gone to sleep, and was tucked up on

the seat. The mother's face looked less harsh and worried than it had looked before. She smiled gratefully at Isabel. "Thank you — you're a good girl," she said in her blunt way.

Isabel, flushing with pleasure, gathered up her belongings and got off the train, with a wave of good-bye to the child she had befriended. Grandfather Stuart was waiting on the platform, in his linen duster and straw hat. He kissed her as she came down the steps. "Give me a good smack," the girl laughed mysteriously. The covered carriage was standing behind the yellow-painted station. They had a three miles' ride to take to the farm.

"Did you have an exciting trip?" asked grandfather, when they were well started on their way.

Isabel told him about the "good smack," and the cross little girl, and how good the child had been as soon as some one was interested in her. "I don't see how anyone can be unkind to a child, do you, grandfather?"

"Well, they're pretty trying sometimes," said Mr. Stuart with a twinkle in his eye. "I remember one time when you were a little bit of a thing, you took a notion you wouldn't have your shoes on,— screamed and kicked and made a great to-do. It seems you had seen some youngster or other with red shoes, and you had a notion you couldn't live without red shoes, too. I recollect that I scoured the town for red shoes, but I couldn't get any your

size. Your mother said it was bad discipline for you to have them anyway."

"I was an obstinate little tyke, wasn't I?" Isabel chuckled. "And I haven't got entirely over it yet. Well, I suppose I had my shoes on sooner or later, didn't I?" She poked a slender foot in a tan pump from under the lap-robe.

"Yes. Toward evening you took up your black shoes, and said, 'Nice shoes, pretty shoes,' and put them on like a lamb, and called me to button them."

"I'm glad I didn't keep on shouting for red shoes indefinitely," said Isabel. "That's where Mr. Coles lives, isn't it?" She indicated a small grey house nearly covered with vines.

"Yes; his boy David broke his leg the other day, falling out of a cherry-tree. Hard on the poor chap. Look! there he is now, sitting on the side porch with his leg up on a chair." Mr. Stuart waved his whip at the boy, who waved back, very shyly.

"Too bad, isn't it?" sighed Isabel.

They crossed the trout-stream that somewhat further on wandered through grandfather's land; and then passed a pond where lilies were spread thickly on the water. Away across the fields there was a red brick house standing rather bleakly by itself on a hill.

"That's the poor-house, isn't it?" said Isabel. "What is it they call it around here? I've forgotten."

"Sanders's," Mr. Stuart replied absently. "A man named Sanders runs it. Somehow, I never like to think about it."

"It isn't very cheerful," assented Isabel. "Ah! there's a house that I *do* like to think about, though!"

As they turned a curve in the road, they saw before them a big white house surrounded by oak trees. The house was simple but dignified and roomy, with green blinds, and lightning-rods on the gables.

Grandmother was at the open window when they came up. They drove through the wagon-gate, and around to the side door. Isabel jumped out without waiting for grandfather to help her, and there was a good deal of kissing and laughing as she went into the house.

The dinner-table was set in the darkened dining-room, where there were screen doors to keep out the flies, and sprays of asparagus in vases on the mantel.

Melissy, the "hired girl," a thin young woman with a sharp chin, was bustling about, bringing in the mashed potato and roast lamb. "Isabel, this is Melissy, who is a great comfort to me," said grandmother, pausing on her way up stairs with the guest.

"How do you do, Melissy?" said Isabel cordially.

"Pleased to meet you," said Melissy with a half-defiant nod. She prided herself on "never knuckling under to nobody." This fair-haired young

person in the hat with the blue flowers on it must not think that she was any better than a self-respecting girl who "worked out."

But when she had noted Isabel's plain tucked blouse, and her simple manners, and heard her praise of the raspberry shortcake, Melissy decided that the visitor was not to be scorned, and treated her with acid pleasantry thereafter.

Isabel's ten days on the farm were very happy. Every morning she took care of her room, and wiped the dishes for Melissy, and filled the vases with asparagus or with flowers. And she read French aloud for half an hour, and practiced French verbs for fifteen minutes. Then the rest of the day she did as she chose. She wandered about the barns, hunting eggs, or watching the process of separating and testing the milk,— a performance as elaborate and as careful as the making of an experiment in a laboratory. She led out the work-horses to drink, keeping well out of the way of their clumsy feet. She fed the chickens and the ducks, played with the puppies, and rode the black pony, Shorty. On rainy days she wrote letters to the people at home, and to Rodney, who was away at a wild lake in Northern Wisconsin, and who gave her thrilling accounts of his adventures.

One day she and grandmother went to call on Mrs. Coles and the boy David, who had broken his leg.

They found the lad,— a blue-eyed little fellow, with red hair that stood up straight, above the

freckles on his forehead,— sitting on the porch, the picture of lonesomeness and misery. "He don't have anybody to amuse him," said Mrs. Coles regretfully. "I'm that busy with the cooking and taking care of the baby that I can't give him more'n a minute or two at a time, and his father has to be out in the field all day. It does seem hard, but I guess he'll stand it." She smiled hopefully down at the boy, who gave her a sad smile in return.

"I know some stories," said Isabel hesitatingly. "Would you like to hear one, David?"

The boy looked at her eagerly, his face lighting up with interest. "You bet I would," he answered briefly.

Grandmother went into the house, where she was soon helping Mrs. Coles to stone some cherries for canning; and Isabel was left to entertain the lad with very dramatic accounts of King Arthur and his Knights, and the humorous tale of the Elephant and his Trunk from the *Just-So Stories*. The absorbed attention of the listener inspired her to her most stirring tones and gestures.

"Golly, that was a dandy story!" was her reward after the last recital. "It's most as good as goin' to the circus."

Isabel laughed, and proposed a game of checkers, and after that there were lemonade and round cakes with pink-frosting, that grandmother had brought.

"I'll come again if you'll let me," said Isabel, as the boy said a reluctant good-bye.

"I'd be awful thankful if you would," he replied with anxious eagerness.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Carleton," put in the worried mother. "It'd be a blessing if you could, but we don't want to ask too much of you."

"I'll ride over on Shorty!" promised Isabel. "And I'll think up a lot more stories before I come."

And so nearly every day she had her canter on the pony to see the lonely boy, whose pleasure and gratitude were ample payment for her trouble. Then, toward the last, she had a little adventure with some of the inmates of the big red house across the fields.

CHAPTER XVII

SANDERS'S

ISABEL was standing on the side porch one afternoon, looking off across the fields and the gap in the wood-lot, toward the plain red brick building half a mile away.

"That's Sanders's, isn't it, Melissy," she called through the screen door —"that brick house over there?"

"Yes, that's the poor-house," answered Melissy, who was not in the habit of mincing her words. "It's queer how the folks around here call it just 'Sanders's.' *I* call a spade a spade." She was cleaning the dining-room, and Isabel could hear the swish of the mop over the paint.

"Have you ever been there, Melissy?" asked Isabel, still looking across the fields.

"Me? At the poor-house? Good land, no! What made you ask that?"

"Oh, dear! I only meant did you ever go there to look around? It must be awfully interesting."

"I guess you wouldn't think so if you was livin' there," replied Melissy drily.

"Aren't they — aren't they *treated* well?" asked Isabel in a troubled voice.

"Oh, yes, I guess so," Melissy responded, "but

then, there's a lot of 'em, an' they're most of 'em old, an' they live awful plain, an'— well, it ain't what you'd call interestin' exactly. I should think that the Lord had afflicted me quite some, if He called on me to go there. I knew an old lady that was sent there last year, and she did cry an' take on somethin' terrible."

Isabel cringed. She was not very good at hearing painful things. "I think I'll go for a walk, Melissy," she said. "Tell grandma if she asks about me."

"Uh-huh," answered Melissy, wringing out her mop. It was impossible to train her free spirit to make replies like Olga's "Yes, miss," and "Yes, Miss Isabel."

Isabel walked out through the garden, and past the orchard, and down among the rows of corn, and then across the meadow, till she came to the bank of the stream that meandered through Mr. Stuart's land. Here she stopped and looked about, and then picked and ate a few of the early dewberries, showing black and luscious among the vines.

Sauntering along, she came to a place where the water was shallow, and the white sand and round yellow pebbles looked so inviting that she wondered whether there would be any harm in her taking off her shoes and stockings and dabbling her feet for a little while.

She drew off one shoe, and then a crackling of the underbrush startled her. She waited a few minutes, but nobody came; reassured, she took off her shoes

and stockings and recklessly paddled her feet in the cool water. Then she gathered up her skirts and waded about. The trees rose high above the stream, casting green shadows on the water. Pink and white fox-gloves stood straight and lovely on the bank. Now and then a kingfisher darted above the creek with a harsh cry.

Suddenly the girl heard voices in the grove beyond the foot-bridge that spanned the current. She scrambled to the shore, wiped her feet on her petticoat, and hastily drew her stockings on over her damp ankles. And then she thought, "Why, they're only women's voices anyway. I don't need to be so scared." She listened, and noticed that the voices were rising higher and higher in shrill complaint.

Hurriedly tying the laces of her shoes, she rose, and rather timidly walked across the footbridge. Peeping through the bushes, she saw two old ladies, in dresses of faded grey print made just alike. One old lady was short and round and plump-faced, and the other was spare and taller, with a long wrinkled face and dull black eyes. The two women were standing under a tree on a knoll; their green gingham sun-bonnets, a small tin pail, and a parcel wrapped in newspaper lay on the ground.

"I told you to bring 'em," the spare one was saying in tones of reproach. "I said I'd get the sugar an' the bread, if you'd get the other things. Why, I told you just as plain!"

The stout one turned her face tremulously to her companion. "Why, Letty," she said, as if repeating her only defence, "I honestly thought,— I was sure you said you'd bring 'em."

"I told you twice," reiterated the thin woman. "Oh, Anne! Our picnic's spoiled."

Tears began to trickle down the stout woman's face. She sat down heavily, and wiped her eyes with the flounce of her green sun-bonnet. She was sniffling audiby.

Isabel ran quickly up the path among the underbrush. "What is it?" she asked quietly. "Is anything the matter?"

For a moment the two old ladies were startled, and then they looked relieved, when they saw that their visitor was only a girl, with a bright face and steady grey eyes.

"It's the matches," wailed the stout woman, "an' the potatoes. Letty told me to bring 'em, an' I got mixed up somehow, an' forgot 'em."

"Forgot the potatoes?" asked Isabel in a puzzled voice.

"No, the matches; we was goin' to roast 'em, an' now we can't."

"Oh, you were going to roast the potatoes, and you forgot the matches. Is that it?" Isabel began to feel less distressed.

"Yes, that's it," said the taller woman, called Letty. "It's too far to go back an' get 'em, an' anyway, some one'd be sure to ask us what we

wanted, and start objectin'. It's awful hard to get anythin' without explainin' to everybody."

"Oh, I can get you some matches in ten minutes," laughed Isabel. "I'd love to. Were you having a picnic?"

"Yes, a real out-door picnic," said the stout woman eagerly. "This lady's Mrs. Scott, an' I'm Mrs. Frisby. We live over to Sanders's —"

"An' we got so tired of never havin' any fun at all," the other one broke in, "that I says to Anne this mornin', when we was washin' the dishes, I says, 'Anne Frisby, when have we ever had any fun, I'd like to know?'"

"An' I says," put in Mrs. Frisby, "that folks that live at the — at Sanders's ain't expected to have any fun as I know of; an' she says —"

"I says if we don't have any, it's our own fault. They's lots o' good times to be had in the world, I says."

"Well, they seem to keep out o' our way, Letty Scott. We ain't had much of 'em in the last five year."

"I up and proposed a picnic," said Mrs. Scott, her eyes getting brighter. "I didn't see no reason why we couldn't have one."

"Why, there isn't any reason," said Isabel. "Now, I'm going to run right up to the house as fast as I can, and get the matches. I'm Mr. Stuart's granddaughter — you may have seen Mr. Stuart, though he hasn't lived here such a very long time." The two old women nodded. "If you can get the

fire all ready to light by the time I come back, it will hurry things," she said, turning back across the foot-bridge.

She sped through the meadow and up among the corn-leaves, thinking, as she went, of what her grandfather had said to her not very long ago, "Old people need their good times, just as much as young folks,— and more, perhaps, because they haven't so long to have a good time *in*." It was only a few minutes till she had burst into the summer kitchen, where Melissy was washing her hands at the sink.

"Is grandmother here, Melissy?" she asked breathlessly.

"She's takin' her nap. You don't want to wake her up, do you?"

"No, of course not. But I want some matches, and oh! lots of things. Grammy won't care if I have a picnic, will she?"

"Land, no!" answered Melissy, drying her hands on the roller-towel. "She'd be tickled to death. What sort of things do yeh want for it?"

"Well, cake, and butter, and — What do they have to eat over at Sanders's, Melissy?"

"Land o' Goshen, not much of anything, I guess, except salt pork an' beans an' boiled cabbage, an' the like o' that. You wasn't thinkin' o' goin' over there to board, was yeh?" Melissy's eyes twinkled as she began pulling down her sleeves.

"Not yet. I was just wondering, Melissy."

"Well, wonderin' is good exercise. Now I'll get

the cake-box, an' we'll begin on that." Melissy brought the tin box from the pantry, and began cutting a slice from a spice-cake, scattered through with raisins.

"Big slices, and enough for three," said Isabel, standing by the table.

"Your appetite's surely improving," said Melissy tartly. "What else?"

"Cold meat, and cheese, and anything good that you have on hand. Lots of it, too. I'll tell you about it later, but let's hurry now."

They quickly packed a basket with food, Melissy suppressing her curiosity, and rapidly fitting out the basket with a good supply of eatables. Her bark was very much worse than her bite.

Snatching a box of matches, Isabel hurried back with her spoils; she hid the basket under the end of the foot-bridge. The two old ladies were sitting expectantly beside a heap of sticks and dried leaves, which they had carefully surrounded by stones.

Mrs. Frisby gave a gasp when Isabel appeared. "I kind o' thought maybe you wouldn't come back," she sighed. Her sense of guilt for having forgotten the matches had made her all the more doubtful. "It seemed too sort o' good to be true," she murmured.

"I was sure she'd come back," said Mrs. Scott emphatically. "She don't look the disappointin' kind."

Isabel struck a match on a stone, and the heap of

fuel sputtered and blazed. "It'll be fun to roast the potatoes," she said happily. "I haven't roasted any since I was a youngster, knee-high to a grasshopper."

"Me either," said Anne Frisby. She had the potatoes washed and wrapped in green leaves, ready for the baking. When the fire had burned down somewhat, the lumps of green were carefully inserted under the coals.

"We couldn't think of anything we could get to bring on this picnic, excep' bread," volunteered Anne Frisby a few minutes later, "an' that seemed so kind o' dry an' uninterestin', an' then we —"

"I thought of 'em, just as quick," interrupted Mrs. Scott. "I says, 'Why couldn't we roast some potatoes?'"

"An' then at dinner, I heard Daddy Crole say that the raspberries down in the pasture was ripe, an' I whispered to Letty —"

"Yes, an' poor old Mis' Taylor, she spoke out an' says, 'Tain't fair, whisperin' in comp'ny. Sure to be a lie,' says she, 'an' I bet it was somethin' about me!' She always thinks folks is talkin' about her."

"I told her 'twan't nothin' about her, any more'n about the moon. 'Don't worry,' I says, 'it ain't nothin' but a piece o' our foolery.'" Mrs. Frisby smiled reminiscently.

"We might 'a' asked her, poor soul," said Mrs. Scott, uncomfortably, "but I do declare, though it

may not be Christian to say so, the way her head keeps a-nid-noddin' all the time makes me kind o' seasick."

Isabel listened, dropping fuel from time to time upon the fire, and poking the potatoes to see whether they were getting done. The two old women went on talking, telling her about the life at the poor-house, and occasionally asking her a question about herself. She told them that they were not to call her *Miss Carleton,* but just *Isabel.* "I'm too young to be *Miss* to older people," she said simply.

"It's one of the prettiest names there is — the name Isabel," said Mrs. Scott meditatively. "I knew an Isabel once, years ago, when I was a girl, and I liked her awful well, but she went to Missoury or somewheres with her folks, an' I never heard tell of her afterwards. She had real black hair, not yellow like yours."

"Mrs. Scott an' I've been room-mates to Sanders's for most five years — ain't we, Letty? — an' we know pretty near all there is t'know about each other by this time," Mrs. Frisby remarked. "I guess we've heard all about every single soul either one of us ever met, almost's if they was our own folks. In winter it's mighty lonesome, when we can't git out, and we just have to sit an' talk an' talk till it seems sometimes as if they ain't another word to say about anything on earth — leastways the things we've ever heard about."

"After this we'll have a picnic every summer, an' then we can talk about it in the winter," said Mrs.

Scott, shifting her position so that she could lean more comfortably against a tree.

"When my man was alive, we used to take picnic dinners to camp-meetin'," said Mrs. Frisby, her round wrinkled face lighting up with the memory; "an' we used to have marble cake, sometimes, an' pound cake, the richest yellowest pound cake you ever saw, with raisins in it. There! I could turn my hand at makin' a cake about as well as the next one, if I do say it. It surely was appetizin'."

"Well, Anne, there won't be no cake to this picnic"; Mrs. Scott spoke with mournful kindness. "But then, you know," she went on consolingly, "the raspberries'll taste real good. We don't get that sort o' thing very much where we live."

Anne Frisby answered bravely, smiling across the fire at her old room-mate, "I guess we had our share o' good things quite a while ago, when we had homes of our own. We ain't complainin', are we, Letty?"

"N-no; not complainin',— just rememberin'."

Isabel stabbed a potato with a sharpened stick. "Set the table," she cried, "supper's almost ready!"

Mrs. Scott, all hospitable excitement, spread out the clean coarse towel that she had brought. The deficiencies of the feast began to overwhelm her. "You'll want butter," she said nervously to Isabel, "and we didn't bring any,— we don't have butter very often except on Sundays. All we could get was just salt for the potatoes."

Isabel drew her basket out of the shade of the foot-bridge. "I brought a little butter," she said, busy with the paper and linen coverings of the basket; and she took out a glass jar with a bit of ice still swimming about at the top, above the butter.

Anne Frisby stood by, with her eyes wide and happy, like a child's. "It's a pile better than just salt," she exulted, her lips trembling; "an' it does seem like a kind of a fairy story, to have butter springin' out of a basket like that!"

"I guess we found a fairy, too," echoed Mrs. Scott, laying her knotted hand on the girl's shoulder. "It's kind o' as if she sailed down out o' the trees, or popped up out o' the grass."

Isabel caught the thin old hand and patted it. "We're all fairies," she laughed, "and we're going to have the most glorious woodsy picnic!"

Leaves and bits of birch bark were the plates, where the slices of cold roast mutton, and the cubes of cheese were spread out upon the cloth. There were three paste-board plates, too, from the pile that grandmother always kept on hand for picnics, or for the times when the hired men had to carry their dinners to some remote part of the farm.

"For the land's sake — paper plates!" said Letty Scott, taking one up and examining it. "I've heard tell of 'em, but I never see one till now. Just think, Anne, what a sight o' washin' they'd save us if we could have 'em over to Sanders's!"

"Yes, an' there wouldn't be nicks all around the aidge of 'em, neither," rejoined Anne Frisby.

"Them nicks does go against my grain like sixty. An' Daddy Crole could keep a droppin' of 'em as much as he chose, an' wouldn't be always gettin' scolded for breakin' of 'em."

"Poor old Daddy Crole!" sighed Isabel under her breath. But just then she was taking out the jar of milk that Melissy had put into the basket, and then she unwrapped the cake from its paper napkin.

Anne Frisby gave a kind of triumphant crow. "There, Letty Scott!" she boasted, "you said there wouldn't be no cake to this picnic, an' just look a' this!" There were actually tears in her faded blue eyes. "I always did relish a good piece o' cake," she said ecstatically, "an' that's somethin' that's scarcer'n gold nuggets at Sanders's Hotel."

All three of them sat down with the happiest of laughter. Never was such a greenwood feast as that. The potatoes were mealy and richly buttered, though perceptibly flavored with smoke. "Make you feel as if you reely was right out in the open," purred Anne Frisby, taking a rather smudgy mouthful, accompanied by a generous bite of cold meat.

"I used to like milk on my baked potato," smiled Letty Scott, pouring some out on her paper plate; "and my Eddie, he wouldn't eat it any other way. He was such a dear little soul! He didn't live to grow up. I took it desperate hard then, but a good many times since, I've been kind o' glad that he was out of his troubles. Mebbe, though," she added thoughtfully, "I wouldn't 'a' had to go to Sanders's if he'd grown to be a man."

For a while neither Isabel nor Anne Frisby had anything to say. In the silence, the tap-tap of a wood-pecker echoed through the grove, and the gurgling of the water rushing over the stones sounded murmurously in the air. A cow lowed at a distance, and the tinkling of a bell followed.

"It's a-gettin' along in the afternoon," said Anne Frisby at last, taking a second piece of cheese. "We must show up in time to set the table, or Mis' Sanders'll be sendin' out a posse fer us."

"Guess we won't be wantin' very much cold beans for *our* supper," responded Mrs. Scott, coming back from her dream of what might have been.

"It's time for the raspberries and cake," cried Isabel. "We seem to have gotten rid of almost everything else." Mrs. Scott carefully divided the contents of the tin pail into three portions, which were heaped into the saucers that Isabel had brought. A parcel of sugar done up in a bit of newspaper had been one of the contributions from Sanders's.

"I'm goin' to eat my cake real slow, so's it'll last longer," said Anne Frisby, with her spoon in one hand and her slice of cake in the other.

They were silent again while the dessert was disappearing.

"We won't never forget this picnic," sighed Mrs. Scott, wiping her lips on her paper napkin. "We'll be talkin' about it all winter, won't we, Anne?"

"We'll have it fer a secret," answered Mrs.

Frisby. "But goodness me, Letty, we'd better be goin', or there'll be trouble in camp."

They rose, with some wry faces over stiffened joints, and began to gather up the dishes. "Let's leave everything neat an' clean," said Mrs. Scott. "I do hate to see paper'n' stuff scattered around."

In a few minutes the party was breaking up. There was a tiny lump in Isabel's throat. "We can't say thank you like we'd ought," murmured Anne Frisby, "an' so we ain't goin' to say it at all."

"We've had the loveliest time," supplemented Mrs. Scott.

"So have I," said Isabel. "I'm awfully glad I know you. I wish we could have another picnic, but I'm going home the day after to-morrow."

"We won't forget you," beamed Mrs. Frisby. "I tell you, we'll talk about you more'n a little."

"I'll send you some postal cards once in a while," said the girl. There were ever so many things that she wanted to say, but she could only squeeze the wrinkled hands held out to her, and smile wistfully. "Good-bye, good-bye," she repeated gently. "It's been a glorious picnic."

She watched the two forms in the faded grey print dresses and the green gingham sun-bonnets, as they disappeared through the trees. Then she picked up her basket, and went slowly back to the house. Her heart was aching a trifle, but it was

happy, too. "Poor old souls!" she kept saying over and over, "poor dear old souls!" And again she reflected, as she had done so many times during this last year, "What a mix-up life is, anyway!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE REAL LADY

"YES, of course, Olga," said Mrs. Carleton, who had just risen from the breakfast table, "if your sister is ill, you must go and see her."

Olga, wearing her coat and hat in anticipation of her mistress's reply, hastened away with a word of thanks.

"It's too bad it's to-day that she has to go, isn't it, mother?" said Isabel, beginning to gather up the knives and forks and put them on the wicker tray. "We've had breakfast so late, and it's cleaning day, and you have to read your paper at the Woman's Club luncheon. Isn't that the way things always go?"

"I never knew it to fail," answered Mrs. Carleton, smiling humorously through her worried look. "Maids always leave one at the worst possible time. But Olga is so good and conscientious that we ought not to complain."

"And it isn't her fault that her sister fell down stairs," commented Isabel, who had a strong sense of justice, which sometimes became severe. She looked very pretty and girlish in her green-and-white percale, with a black velvet ribbon around her hair.

"I shouldn't mind so much," Mrs. Carleton went on with a sigh, "if I merely had that paper to read, but it happens that I'm on the finance committee, too, and we have to meet at half past ten for the last auditing. The report goes in at the end of the luncheon. We're combining business and pleasure to-day."

"We'll get along somehow, Mother-Bird," reassured Isabel, working busily at the table. "Since father's off on this fishing trip, and you're going to have a sumptuous repast, we girls won't have much lunch — just bread and milk, or something. Fanny and I'll do what we can to make the house look right. It's a good thing that there's no school, and that Cousin Eunice isn't arriving to-day."

Mrs. Carleton, watering the sword-fern at the back window, still looked disturbed. "I believe I heard the postman," she said suddenly. "That front door-bell is out of order again. Run, Isabel, and see if there's a letter from Cousin Eunice."

"Yes, there is!" cried the girl, coming back with a square envelope heavily bordered with black. "Oh, mother, you don't suppose —"

Mrs. Carleton tore open the letter, and glanced it through hastily. "Yes!" she exclaimed with a mixture of pleasure and despair in her tone, "she's finished that business in Freeport earlier than she expected, and she'll be here to-day — to-day, Isabel!"

"At what time?" asked Isabel excitedly.

"Not till half past five. That isn't so bad, is

it? I can get home by half past two or three, and we can fly around and put things in order, and have dinner ready by the time she gets up from the station. I've seen many a worse domestic crisis than this."

"Oh, dear!" said Isabel, "it's lovely that she's really coming, but how contrary things can be, can't they?"

"Fanny!" called Mrs. Carleton, going to the sitting-room door, "Cousin Eunice is coming to-day. Run over and see if Mrs. Hogan can come and help us for a few hours. Things *must* be cleaned nicely," she added, turning to Isabel again; "they've been neglected all the week, because Olga and I had to put up all those apples and quinces that mother sent from the farm."

"Oh, mother," Isabel burst out, with a frown, "we must have things nice for Cousin Eunice, mustn't we? It isn't just because she has money, and can have everything she wants,— but she's so particular (I can tell that from her letters), and she's lived abroad for so many years, with servants to wait on her, hand and foot. I want her to see that we are ladies, and that we know how to have everything just right."

Mrs. Carleton laughed. "Well, Little One," she said quizzically, "when you've kept house as many years as I have, you'll understand that there are times when you can't have everything absolutely correct."

"I know, mother, but we must make a special

effort to have things dainty and attractive — the house, and our clothes, and what we have to eat, and all. I don't want Cousin Eunice to think that because father is a poor professor we aren't just as refined as the other members of the family. And anyway, it's our duty to make her as comfortable and happy as we can."

Mrs. Carleton was not listening to what Isabel was saying. She was too busy clearing away the dishes and folding the table-cloth. "Mrs. Hogan will get the worst of the work out of the way before I come back," she said, "and you may do what you can to help; and then I'll see about the dinner. I'm sure we shall be presentable."

"We want to be a lot more than *that*," protested Isabel.

Mrs. Carleton hurried up stairs to put her own room in order, to get her committee notes ready, and to dress.

After a little while, Fanny came back, out of breath, her eyes dancing. "Mrs. Hogan can't come nohow," she quoted giggling. "It's half-crazy she is with the toothache, and him bringin' his first wife's mother for supper, and not a stitch in the house to eat!"

Isabel laughed in spite of her vexation. "Then we'll have to pitch in, Gipsy-Girl, and do the best we can by ourselves. Where's Celia?"

"Out in the back yard, playing Indian, and do let her stay there. She's as cross as two sticks because I wouldn't let her paste pictures in my kodak-

book. And, oh, Isabel, I hate to remind you, but this is the day for my violin lesson. I've got to take it, no matter what happens. I guess Cousin Eunice isn't so nice but what she can stand what we can."

"Oh, Fanny!" Isabel cried reproachfully, "when people come to see you, you like them to have what they're accustomed to. Now, that's a good girl, you go and get my room ready for our guest; I'll share with you while she's here. Don't forget to air the sheets in the sun, and wipe all around the mop-board so there won't be any dust," — Isabel spoke with anxious importance — "and make the bed just the way they taught you in your Domestic Science class. You can do it very nicely if you try."

"All right," called Fanny, on her way up stairs; "but remember I have to go for my lesson pretty soon."

Just then the ice-man came, and the woman from the country, with the eggs and the butter; and then the groceries had to be ordered over the telephone. "I know mother says that's no way to order," sighed the young housewife, "but I can't get time to go out for them to-day."

Mrs. Carleton, in her cloak and hat, and her pretty blue silk gown with the real lace fichu, stepped to the kitchen door, looking worried, and feeling in her hand-bag to see that she had everything that she needed. Fanny had told her about Mrs. Hogan. "I'm sorry to leave you like this, child," she said

nervously, "but I'll come back just the minute I can get away. I ought to telephone for a man to come and repair that door-bell, but I haven't time. Don't work too hard, dear." She came over to the ice-box, where Isabel was putting the eggs away, and gave the girl a kiss, holding her skirts clear of the floor. Then she hurried out through the dining-room, and the side door.

"I know what's a good thing to do," murmured Isabel to herself, "and that is to get every room all mussed up, and then I'll just have to put it to rights, whether I get tired or not. I might be tempted to give things 'a lick and a promise,' as grandmother says, if I did one room at a time. I'm determined that this house shall be perfectly spick and span when our distinguished guest arrives on the scene!"

She carried some of the rugs out to the back porch and shook them; others she swept thoroughly and piled in the front hall. She heaped books and ornaments on sofas and covered them with newspapers, and draped the curtains high, out of the dust. Three floors she went over with a dampened mop, but the dining-room floor seemed to need special attention. "I'll just go at it like a professional," exclaimed the enthusiastic young cleaning-woman.

She was down on her knees, in a long blue gingham apron, a white cloth tied round her head, and her sleeves rolled up, wiping the last corner of the dining-room floor, when she heard a step in the

sitting-room. Then a woman's voice, very mellow and "Eastern," asked, "Is Mrs. Carleton in?"

Isabel looked up, a swift horror in her heart. The lady standing in the door was tall and handsome, and dressed in mourning. "I came right in," she apologised, "because the bell didn't seem to ring."

Isabel rose from her knees. Her face was flushed, her hair straggled out from under her wild-looking turban, her apron was soiled, her hands were red and dripping. "I won't cry!" she was saying to herself, "I won't — oh, I won't!" Then she said aloud, in as pleasant a voice as she could command, "No, mother isn't at home. She had to go to a Woman's Club luncheon."

A slight change passed over the face of the visitor. "She thought I was a servant!" flashed through Isabel's mind.

"I'm sorry —" began the lady.

"Are you father's Cousin Eunice?" Isabel said calmly. "We're ever and ever so glad to see you."

She took the cloth from her head, wiped her hands on it, and came over to the woman, who kissed her warmly. "And so this is Isabel? Just think! I haven't seen you since you were five years old. You've changed a good deal!" She appeared oblivious of the disorder about her.

"I dare say I have changed in twelve years," Isabel laughed. But she was thinking, "Oh, what a mess! It's too awful, but I won't show how *terribly* I feel."

"Didn't you get my telegram?" asked Mrs. Everard. "I sent one several hours ago, when I discovered that I could take an earlier train than I expected to. But perhaps this is it — I found it under the door." She held out a small yellow envelope.

Isabel took it quietly, though her heart was beating hard with chagrin. "The boy probably left it there because nobody came to the door," she said. "I'm sorry we didn't get it, but you're just as welcome, anyway." Her eyes met the dark eyes of the lady, who looked so sad in her black clothes that Isabel found herself feeling more pained than embarrassed. If mother should lose father —!

"Come up to your room," she said cordially, with an assurance that she was far from feeling. "Oh, if Fanny has only made things half-way neat!" she was thinking frantically. "Where is your luggage?" she asked aloud.

"The cab-man left it on the porch — except this bag." Mrs. Everard lifted a small portmanteau that she had left in the hall.

Isabel took it from her and led the way upstairs. "Did you have a good journey?" she inquired, as she had heard her mother do. Her mind was a whirl of apprehension, too soon justified. At the head of the stairs was a pan of dirty water with a grimy cloth in it. Fanny had cherished the laudable intention of "wiping down" the stairs, but had postponed the task. Isabel shuddered, smiling frozenly at what Mrs. Everard was saying about

the trip from Freeport. There were bedclothes on a chair in the upper hall. Isabel stopped at the door of her room. Fanny had wiped the mop-board, to be sure, and aired the sheets,— but the room was in the wildest turmoil, the half-done stage at which any room looks its worst. Cousin Eunice, telling about a bewildered old lady on the train, pretended not to see.

"I'll take you into mother's room," said Isabel, without a tremor. She could have sunk through the floor, into the blackest depths of the coal-bin, but, "I won't apologise," she kept saying to herself. "It isn't my fault, and I won't make excuses. I hate explanations that can't explain."

All was serene in Mrs. Carleton's room, with its grey walls, its pretty rose-chintz hangings, grey rug, and wicker chairs with their chintz cushions. "Thank heaven," thought the girl with a catch in her breath, "mother's room is always as it should be."

The visitor took off her hat and veil, and opened her travelling-bag. "I'll leave you now for a few minutes," said Isabel, "if you'll excuse me."

On the back stairs, she sat down hard, and put her hands over her burning face. "I wanted her to see what lady-like housekeepers we are!" she cried in a smothered tone. "She sees, I guess! What must she think of us!" She put her head down on her knees, intending to cry, but somehow the funny side of the thing struck her, and she laughed hysterically. "Such a house!" she mur-

mured —" such a *looking* house! And absolutely nothing for lunch, and — oh! how perfectly awful!"

While Isabel was nervously straightening the front hall, the guest came down stairs, looking so stately and elegant that the girl was transfixed with awe. "Oh, you should have stayed upstairs until I put things to rights down here," she cried miserably.

"I'm going to help you," answered the regal looking lady. "Let's take one room at a time; that's the way I always do."

"If I only had!" groaned Isabel. She did not protest, for one must do as this lady commanded. She brought an apron for the black silk gown, and the two attacked the confused and discouraging house.

"The floors are all wiped," said Isabel, glad that Cousin Eunice did not insist on mopping in that gown.

They took the sitting-room first. In a few minutes, the rugs were down, the furniture was whisked into place and dusted, and books and ornaments were disposed of, and the curtains rearranged. Then the other rooms were taken in their order.

While she and Isabel were working, Mrs. Everard told some funny stories of her Italian servants, and gradually Isabel forgot her distress. "I don't know why," she thought, "but somehow I don't care half so much as I ought to."

They were just finishing the dining-room when

Celia rushed in with her hair tousled and her pinafore smeared, and was kissed and held on the visitor's lap. Fanny, hurrying home repentantly with her violin case, stopped amazed at the kitchen door, to see a handsome lady in black silk and one of mother's aprons, wiping dishes while Isabel washed; Bobo was lapping milk out of his yellow pie-plate, and Celia, clean and content, was eating a slice of bread and jelly in Olga's rocking-chair.

There was a most informal but very merry luncheon, with a wonderful Italian omelet, and bread and butter and quince preserves; and then a rest and a lively conversation in the sitting-room, where the old mahogany took on an added charm from the presence of the stately guest.

When Mrs. Carleton came home at three o'clock, they were all gathered in Isabel's room, now the perfection of order, except for the trunk and the bags that Mr. Hogan had found time to bring up from the porch. Cousin Eunice was just burrowing down to the place where she had packed her presents for the girls.

She put her arms around mother's neck and kissed her, and they both cried, thinking of Cousin Henry.

"I've made the acquaintance of all your girls — Isabel first," said Cousin Eunice.

"Yes, Isabel first,— and oh, mother, in *such* a way!" Isabel's grey eyes clouded with the recollection.

"The first thing that I found out about her was

that she is a real lady," said Mrs. Everard putting her hand caressingly on Isabel's shoulder. "A true lady never fusses nor apologises, but keeps herself sweet and calm, no matter what happens. And now for those little presents!"

CHAPTER XIX

TRAGEDY

ONE afternoon in September, Isabel was sitting on the front porch, reading *The Earthly Paradise*. Cousin Eunice and Mrs. Carleton were upstairs consulting as to how the latter lady could most advantageously make over her cream-coloured voile gown. The rest of the family were out on various errands, social or useful. Isabel was not reading very hard; as she turned the pages, she was thinking of the opening of college, now not very far away, and wondering whether Evelyn Taylor's sorority would really "bid" her, and whether college life would be all that she had anticipated.

Then she heard the old high-school whistle, and looking up quickly, saw Rodney Fox coming across the street. He had a crimson sweater on, over a silk shirt, and in his hand he carried a paddle with double blades. He was bare-headed, as he usually was all summer, except on rare occasions of formality. Isabel closed the book and waited till he came up the path. "Greetings, most noble lady!" he said, with an exaggerated bow; "come on,— let's go for a spin across the lake before dinner. Eric's taking Molly in his canoe, and we're going to meet at the boat-house — if you can go."

Isabel jumped up joyously. "Of course I can,"

she said, "if mother doesn't object,— and I don't see why she should. I'll be ready in a jiffy."

"I think she'll be willing," returned Rodney. "There's a pretty stiff breeze, but that's all the more fun, and those grey clouds over there don't mean anything."

"How long shall we be gone?"

"Oh, two hours or so. We're just going to paddle over to Maple Bluff and back."

Isabel ran upstairs, and came down in a few moments, with a white felt hat snugly pinned on, and a white sweater over her arm.

"Mother says, do be careful," she laughed. "Aren't mothers funny? As if you didn't know how to paddle your own canoe!"

"Perhaps she hasn't the confidence in me that you have."

"Oh, yes, she has, but she just worries on general principles. I love to-day," Isabel went on; "it's so blue and soft. There's a kind of grey shadow on things that makes them mysterious and dreamy. What's the reason?"

"It's just the fall coming on," answered Rodney, with masculine wisdom. They were walking through the short street that led to the rambling old University boat-house.

"The vacation's almost over," sighed Isabel. "I rather hate to see it go. And Cousin Eunice is going away pretty soon, too."

"She's charming, isn't she? You must have enjoyed having her around."

"We certainly have!"

"Is she going back to Europe?"

"Yes, but she hasn't decided when. She may visit in the East for a while. Goodness! how I wish I were going to Europe, too. Some people have all the luck. Oh, there are Eric and Molly."

With a chorus of "hello's," and a good deal of laughter about nothing in particular, the group of four met on the dock. "We're going to Picnic Point, aren't we?" asked Eric.

"Why, Maple Bluff, I thought," said Rodney carelessly.

"It doesn't make any diff," rejoined Eric. "One's as dull as the other. But I think the wind is better for the Point. Do you care, girls?"

"Not in the least. It's all the same to us. We're only passengers who haven't paid their fare!"

"Well, jump in, then."

The two canoes darted out from the shadow of the dock, and were soon leaping forward into the blue circle of the lake. The only other boat visible was a launch arriving from the State Hospital, with a trio of doctors in stiff hats and spectacles. "I almost feel as if we owned the lake," said Eric. "Let's put up a sign, 'No trespassing.'"

"Most people don't believe in signs," responded Rodney.

"It's a queer sort of day, isn't it?" commented Molly. "But it's splendiferous for canoeing."

The two boats, keeping close together, bounded gaily along, impelled partly by the wind, and partly

by the vigorous paddling of the two young men. It seemed only a short time until the party landed on Picnic Point, a long narrow beak of land about midway of the width of the lake.

They walked about a few minutes, "to limber up their legs," as Eric delicately put it, and then returned to the boats, which were drawn up on the sloping shore.

"Well, say!" exclaimed Rodney, motioning toward the west, "those clouds don't look any too funny, do they?"

Eric, his light hair blowing, twisted about, as he was loosening the prow of his canoe from the hold of the wet sand. "They *are* a little squally," he said thoughtfully, "but I guess they're all right. I've seen 'em a good deal worse."

Molly was buttoning her rose-coloured jersey closely about her, for the wind had grown rather chilly. "Do you think we'd better walk back?" she asked earnestly. Her eyes were troubled, as she turned from Rodney to Eric.

"Oh, no," said Eric, easily. "It's too far to walk now before dinner. Besides, what could we do with the canoes? Better start, hadn't we, Rod?"

"There isn't a bit of *danger,*" answered Rodney. "We may have a pretty hard pull of it, but I don't think the storm can amount to anything."

"All right, then; here goes. Are you game, girls?"

"Yes, if you are!"

"Be careful, Eric," called Rodney, as the two

boats were whirled apart, in the rush of the wind. "Keep cool, and don't try to go too fast." Rodney was the more experienced canoeist of the two.

"Just so," shouted Eric across the tumbled water. "It's going to be all right."

The shadow over the lake began to darken, and the wind grew stronger. Rodney was paddling calmly and firmly, and the boat went forward with a steady rhythmic sweep, though not rapidly. Eric and Molly were considerably ahead, and their boat seemed to waver and curvet through the waves. Once or twice Rodney called to them to go more slowly, but it was evident that they did not hear.

The wind had now increased to a gale, and the sky was black and lowering. "We shouldn't have started," said Isabel, feeling a first thrill of real alarm.

"No, we shouldn't have," replied her companion briefly.

"Can't we go back?"

"No use now. The current's too strong around the Point. We're here, and we're in for it, Isabel."

The girl did not reply, but she set her lips very hard. The waves began to splash over the edge of the canoe, and a scattered drive of rain-drops fell like bullets on the water. Rodney was scarcely paddling now, but bending all his efforts toward keeping the craft upright, with its nose toward shore. Molly and Eric, wherever they were, had disappeared into the gloom of the clouds and rain.

"Isabel," said Rodney at last, in a low, hard voice, without looking round, "we're likely to go over, you know. Take off your shoes, and your hat, and your sweater, and your woollen skirt." Quietly, holding by one hand to the rim of the canoe, Isabel did as she was told. She shivered as the wind cut through her muslin garments.

"You can't swim much, can you?" Rodney had to strain his voice above the fury of the storm.

"No, only a little," Isabel rejoined in a stifled tone. The waves were now dashing over the prow of the boat, drenching Rodney's red sweater till it was heavy with water. He could not let go the paddle to take it off. Isabel's teeth were chattering, whether with fear or cold she scarcely knew.

"I can swim," Rodney went on; "and when we go over, hold to me. I'll catch the edge of the boat."

"Yes, Rodney."

"Some one will come. We can hold on a long time." The boy's voice was indistinct in the gust. He raised it still higher. "Don't take in any water if you can help it. Keep your mouth closed when you go down."

"Yes, Rod." A paralysing terror gripped the girl, but she forced her lips to make reply.

"And whatever happens, *don't give up!*" He was shouting now above the howl of the wind. "Can you hear me? *Don't give up!*"

"No — no — I won't."

There was a lull in the shriek of the tempest, and

Rodney, his arms still taut in his struggle to keep the boat in its course, raised his head and looked at Isabel. Her hair was flying, her face white and expressionless. Their eyes met in one swift, speaking look.

"I'll save you, dear," said Rodney.

Then there was a long time — hours, it seemed — of silent battling. Rodney's shoulders bent and swayed with the motion of the boat. Isabel kept her eyes upon them and thought of nothing, except that now and then the question of Molly and Eric stabbed her through.

At last, with a quick, short, swinging lurch, the canoe went over.

As Isabel dropped down into the black surge of the water, she kept her mouth closed and held her breath. "Rodney will save me," a thin voice said within her brain. She put out her arms with the swimming motion that she had been taught, but her limbs were stiff with cold, and she felt heavy and torpid. She was going down. But, "Rodney *will* save me," she said within herself, almost calmly.

Then a hand was clutching at her arm, and slipping round her shoulder. A voice close at her ear was saying, "Keep up, keep up — we'll make it." Her head was above water again, and she opened her eyes. The grey madness of the storm was all about, and the wild whipping of the rain. But Rodney's wet brown head was there beside her, and his face plaster-white, with shining drops upon it. He was holding her and swimming. "Don't struggle,"

he gasped. "Keep still." And in a moment he had clutched the over-turned boat.

Isabel's mind was dull and leaden. She was conscious only that they had reached the boat. Rodney was panting and blowing water. "Can you hold it?" he asked. He took her arms and put them up against the canoe, so that her fingers touched the middle ridge. They closed upon it, and she hung there half senseless. Rodney supported her as best he could against his shoulder. Little by little her mind cleared. They clung a long time without speaking. The waves hurled themselves savagely against the two slender figures, and the rain lashed them incessantly.

"Keep up!" repeated Rodney, as Isabel gave a groan of exhaustion. "Keep up, Little One. Some one will come." His voice was tense, but not despairing.

"Yes, mother will telephone to the boat-house, and send out a launch," shivered the girl. "Yes, yes! they'll find us all." And then she cried out sharply, "Oh, Rodney! I told her we were going to Maple Bluff!"

The boy's face changed, and grew a shade sterner and whiter. "Never mind," he reiterated, "they'll go to Picnic Point next. They'll find us somehow. Just keep holding on."

They held on grimly and silently again, and the minutes went by like hours and weeks. Isabel was fully conscious of what was passing, but her strength was going. As her aching hands gradually loosened

book. And, oh, Isabel, I hate to remind you, but this is the day for my violin lesson. I've got to take it, no matter what happens. I guess Cousin Eunice isn't so nice but what she can stand what we can."

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"I'm sorry —" began the lady.

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They were just finishing the dining-room when

Celia rushed in with her hair tousled and her pinafore smeared, and was kissed and held on the visitor's lap. Fanny, hurrying home repentantly with her violin case, stopped amazed at the kitchen door, to see a handsome lady in black silk and one of mother's aprons, wiping dishes while Isabel washed; Bobo was lapping milk out of his yellow pie-plate, and Celia, clean and content, was eating a slice of bread and jelly in Olga's rocking-chair.

There was a most informal but very merry luncheon, with a wonderful Italian omelet, and bread and butter and quince preserves; and then a rest and a lively conversation in the sitting-room, where the old mahogany took on an added charm from the presence of the stately guest.

When Mrs. Carleton came home at three o'clock, they were all gathered in Isabel's room, now the perfection of order, except for the trunk and the bags that Mr. Hogan had found time to bring up from the porch. Cousin Eunice was just burrowing down to the place where she had packed her presents for the girls.

She put her arms around mother's neck and kissed her, and they both cried, thinking of Cousin Henry.

"I've made the acquaintance of all your girls — Isabel first," said Cousin Eunice.

"Yes, Isabel first,— and oh, mother, in *such* a way!" Isabel's grey eyes clouded with the recollection.

"The first thing that I found out about her was

that she is a real lady," said Mrs. Everard putting her hand caressingly on Isabel's shoulder. "A true lady never fusses nor apologises, but keeps herself sweet and calm, no matter what happens. And now for those little presents!"

CHAPTER XIX

TRAGEDY

ONE afternoon in September, Isabel was sitting on the front porch, reading *The Earthly Paradise*. Cousin Eunice and Mrs. Carleton were upstairs consulting as to how the latter lady could most advantageously make over her cream-coloured voile gown. The rest of the family were out on various errands, social or useful. Isabel was not reading very hard; as she turned the pages, she was thinking of the opening of college, now not very far away, and wondering whether Evelyn Taylor's sorority would really "bid" her, and whether college life would be all that she had anticipated.

Then she heard the old high-school whistle, and looking up quickly, saw Rodney Fox coming across the street. He had a crimson sweater on, over a silk shirt, and in his hand he carried a paddle with double blades. He was bare-headed, as he usually was all summer, except on rare occasions of formality. Isabel closed the book and waited till he came up the path. "Greetings, most noble lady!" he said, with an exaggerated bow; "come on,— let's go for a spin across the lake before dinner. Eric's taking Molly in his canoe, and we're going to meet at the boat-house — if you can go."

Isabel jumped up joyously. "Of course I can,"

she said, "if mother doesn't object,— and I don't see why she should. I'll be ready in a jiffy."

"I think she'll be willing," returned Rodney. "There's a pretty stiff breeze, but that's all the more fun, and those grey clouds over there don't mean anything."

"How long shall we be gone?"

"Oh, two hours or so. We're just going to paddle over to Maple Bluff and back."

Isabel ran upstairs, and came down in a few moments, with a white felt hat snugly pinned on, and a white sweater over her arm.

"Mother says, do be careful," she laughed. "Aren't mothers funny? As if you didn't know how to paddle your own canoe!"

"Perhaps she hasn't the confidence in me that you have."

"Oh, yes, she has, but she just worries on general principles. I love to-day," Isabel went on: "it's so blue and soft. There's a kind of grey shadow on things that makes them mysterious and dreamy. What's the reason?"

"It's just the fall coming on," answered Rodney, with masculine wisdom. They were walking through the short street that led to the rambling old University boat-house.

"The vacation's almost over," sighed Isabel. "I rather hate to see it go. And Cousin Eunice is going away pretty soon, too."

"She's charming, isn't she? You must have enjoyed having her around."

"We certainly have!"

"Is she going back to Europe?"

"Yes, but she hasn't decided when. She may visit in the East for a while. Goodness! how I wish I were going to Europe, too. Some people have all the luck. Oh, there are Eric and Molly."

With a chorus of "hello's," and a good deal of laughter about nothing in particular, the group of four met on the dock. "We're going to Picnic Point, aren't we?" asked Eric.

"Why, Maple Bluff, I thought," said Rodney carelessly.

"It doesn't make any diff," rejoined Eric. "One's as dull as the other. But I think the wind is better for the Point. Do you care, girls?"

"Not in the least. It's all the same to us. We're only passengers who haven't paid their fare!"

"Well, jump in, then."

The two canoes darted out from the shadow of the dock, and were soon leaping forward into the blue circle of the lake. The only other boat visible was a launch arriving from the State Hospital, with a trio of doctors in stiff hats and spectacles. "I almost feel as if we owned the lake," said Eric. "Let's put up a sign, 'No trespassing.'"

"Most people don't believe in signs," responded Rodney.

"It's a queer sort of day, isn't it?" commented Molly. "But it's splendiferous for canoeing."

The two boats, keeping close together, bounded gaily along, impelled partly by the wind, and partly

by the vigorous paddling of the two young men. It seemed only a short time until the party landed on Picnic Point, a long narrow beak of land about midway of the width of the lake.

They walked about a few minutes, "to limber up their legs," as Eric delicately put it, and then returned to the boats, which were drawn up on the sloping shore.

"Well, say!" exclaimed Rodney, motioning toward the west, "those clouds don't look any too funny, do they?"

Eric, his light hair blowing, twisted about, as he was loosening the prow of his canoe from the hold of the wet sand. "They *are* a little squally," he said thoughtfully, "but I guess they're all right. I've seen 'em a good deal worse."

Molly was buttoning her rose-coloured jersey closely about her, for the wind had grown rather chilly. "Do you think we'd better walk back?" she asked earnestly. Her eyes were troubled, as she turned from Rodney to Eric.

"Oh, no," said Eric, easily. "It's too far to walk now before dinner. Besides, what could we do with the canoes? Better start, hadn't we, Rod?"

"There isn't a bit of *danger,*" answered Rodney. "We may have a pretty hard pull of it, but I don't think the storm can amount to anything."

"All right, then; here goes. Are you game, girls?"

"Yes, if you are!"

"Be careful, Eric," called Rodney, as the two

boats were whirled apart, in the rush of the wind. "Keep cool, and don't try to go too fast." Rodney was the more experienced canoeist of the two.

"Just so," shouted Eric across the tumbled water. "It's going to be all right."

The shadow over the lake began to darken, and the wind grew stronger. Rodney was paddling calmly and firmly, and the boat went forward with a steady rhythmic sweep, though not rapidly. Eric and Molly were considerably ahead, and their boat seemed to waver and curvet through the waves. Once or twice Rodney called to them to go more slowly, but it was evident that they did not hear.

The wind had now increased to a gale, and the sky was black and lowering. "We shouldn't have started," said Isabel, feeling a first thrill of real alarm.

"No, we shouldn't have," replied her companion briefly.

"Can't we go back?"

"No use now. The current's too strong around the Point. We're here, and we're in for it, Isabel."

The girl did not reply, but she set her lips very hard. The waves began to splash over the edge of the canoe, and a scattered drive of rain-drops fell like bullets on the water. Rodney was scarcely paddling now, but bending all his efforts toward keeping the craft upright, with its nose toward shore. Molly and Eric, wherever they were, had disappeared into the gloom of the clouds and rain.

"Isabel," said Rodney at last, in a low, hard voice, without looking round, "we're likely to go over, you know. Take off your shoes, and your hat, and your sweater, and your woollen skirt." Quietly, holding by one hand to the rim of the canoe, Isabel did as she was told. She shivered as the wind cut through her muslin garments.

"You can't swim much, can you?" Rodney had to strain his voice above the fury of the storm.

"No, only a little," Isabel rejoined in a stifled tone. The waves were now dashing over the prow of the boat, drenching Rodney's red sweater till it was heavy with water. He could not let go the paddle to take it off. Isabel's teeth were chattering, whether with fear or cold she scarcely knew.

"I can swim," Rodney went on; "and when we go over, hold to me. I'll catch the edge of the boat."

"Yes, Rodney."

"Some one will come. We can hold on a long time." The boy's voice was indistinct in the gust. He raised it still higher. "Don't take in any water if you can help it. Keep your mouth closed when you go down."

"Yes, Rod." A paralysing terror gripped the girl, but she forced her lips to make reply.

"And whatever happens, *don't give up!*" He was shouting now above the howl of the wind. "Can you hear me? *Don't give up!*"

"No — no — I won't."

There was a lull in the shriek of the tempest, and

Rodney, his arms still taut in his struggle to keep the boat in its course, raised his head and looked at Isabel. Her hair was flying, her face white and expressionless. Their eyes met in one swift, speaking look.

"I'll save you, dear," said Rodney.

Then there was a long time — hours, it seemed — of silent battling. Rodney's shoulders bent and swayed with the motion of the boat. Isabel kept her eyes upon them and thought of nothing, except that now and then the question of Molly and Eric stabbed her through.

At last, with a quick, short, swinging lurch, the canoe went over.

As Isabel dropped down into the black surge of the water, she kept her mouth closed and held her breath. "Rodney will save me," a thin voice said within her brain. She put out her arms with the swimming motion that she had been taught, but her limbs were stiff with cold, and she felt heavy and torpid. She was going down. But, "Rodney *will* save me," she said within herself, almost calmly.

Then a hand was clutching at her arm, and slipping round her shoulder. A voice close at her ear was saying, "Keep up, keep up — we'll make it." Her head was above water again, and she opened her eyes. The grey madness of the storm was all about, and the wild whipping of the rain. But Rodney's wet brown head was there beside her, and his face plaster-white, with shining drops upon it. He was holding her and swimming. "Don't struggle,"

he gasped. "Keep still." And in a moment he had clutched the over-turned boat.

Isabel's mind was dull and leaden. She was conscious only that they had reached the boat. Rodney was panting and blowing water. "Can you hold it?" he asked. He took her arms and put them up against the canoe, so that her fingers touched the middle ridge. They closed upon it, and she hung there half senseless. Rodney supported her as best he could against his shoulder. Little by little her mind cleared. They clung a long time without speaking. The waves hurled themselves savagely against the two slender figures, and the rain lashed them incessantly.

"Keep up!" repeated Rodney, as Isabel gave a groan of exhaustion. "Keep up, Little One. Some one will come." His voice was tense, but not despairing.

"Yes, mother will telephone to the boat-house, and send out a launch," shivered the girl. "Yes, yes! they'll find us all." And then she cried out sharply, "Oh, Rodney! I told her we were going to Maple Bluff!"

The boy's face changed, and grew a shade sterner and whiter. "Never mind," he reiterated, "they'll go to Picnic Point next. They'll find us somehow. Just keep holding on."

They held on grimly and silently again, and the minutes went by like hours and weeks. Isabel was fully conscious of what was passing, but her strength was going. As her aching hands gradually loosened

their hold upon the boat, she seemed to see the whole of the last year unfolding before her,— all the troubles, and the good times, and the surprises and disappointments. She thought of Molly and Eric, and they seemed to stand before her as they had done on Commencement Day, with their serious absorbed young faces, ready always, nevertheless, to expand into smiles. She remembered what Molly had said on Commencement night — something about "the end." "This *is* the end," said Isabel, half aloud. And she saw with strange and startling clearness all the family at home, and knew, as she had never known before, how deeply and unchangingly they loved her, and loved one another. "But this is the end," she heard some one saying, not knowing the sound of her own voice.

"No, no!" another voice was answering passionately. "It's not the end. It's only a beginning."

"I can't keep up any longer, Rodney," murmured Isabel. "Let me go."

The boy moved closer along the pitching boat. His face twitched with the pain of cramping limbs. His cheek was close to Isabel's. "No! no! no! Keep up! I can't let you go — *now!* Don't, don't give up!"

"Yes, yes." Her eyes were shut, her brain grew grey and dull again. "I'm going," she whispered, "you — can save — yourself. Tell mother —" Her arms relaxed, and she was slipping down lower into the waves.

A shaking hand closed upon the folds of her muslin blouse. Rodney put his lips to her ear. "Isabel! Isabel!" He was pleading for her life. "I think I hear the launch. Wait a little longer — just a minute — just a second. Try, dear! *Try!*" The girl's stiff fingers reached again for the ridge of the tossing boat. They seemed to hold, like hard dead bits of wood. And she knew nothing more.

It might have been months afterward that she was dimly aware of being lifted, and rolled in heavy wrappings. Men's voices were speaking, she did not know where, and there was a fiery trickle of something that was poured down her throat. She felt vague pains and agonies, and the racking of all her bones. The puffing of an engine and the swing of the floor beneath her suggested the presence of a launch, but she was too stupid with cold and misery to know what was happening. At last she was lifted again, and opening her eyes, she saw the rafters and the cobwebs of the boat-house roof. Another glance showed a stiff dripping figure being carried by two men in rain-coats. "Rodney!" The thought struck and crushed her, as with a falling rock. For hours more, all consciousness was gone.

When Isabel came to herself again, she was lying on a sofa somewhere in a house, and her mother's face was over her,— white, with tears on the cheeks, but real and human and loving. "Don't talk, don't speak, dear," Mrs. Carleton was saying. "You're all right. Mother's here."

Isabel was warm and dry, under blankets, and there were hot bricks and water-bottles about her, she could feel their grateful warmth or hear their *chug-chug* when she attempted to move. She felt very stiff and heavy and wooden. "Mother!" she tried to say, but made no sound.

Father appeared, too, looking very sick and queer. She could not distinguish the other people, but there were two or three about.

"Rodney?" she whispered at last, with a terrible effort. She could not remember all that had taken place, but she knew she must ask about Rodney.

"Yes, yes, he's all right," Mrs. Carleton said hastily. "He's perfectly safe. Don't try to talk, darling."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Isabel exulted. "I'm so glad!

"You sent the launch for us, didn't you? We thought you would."

"Yes, we tried both places. Now don't say any more."

Isabel drank some hot milk, and then drifted off into a sound, refreshing sleep.

It was late at night when she woke. A light was burning somewhere in the room. "Where am I?" thought the girl. It had not occurred to her to wonder before. She peered about through the shadows, certain that she was not at home, but dubious as to where she had really found herself. Then she saw, where a shaft of light struck the wall, a square of Chinese embroidery, orange-coloured,

with a design of peacocks and dragons. It was in Mrs. Mitchell's sitting-room. "Of course," she thought — "the Mitchells live near the lake,— that's why I'm here." The terrible experience of the afternoon began to come back to her, but she fought it off. "I can't bear to think of it now!" she said hurriedly, within herself.

She closed her eyes for a moment, and when she opened them, a man was feeling her pulse, and other forms were standing behind him. He stepped back, and then her mother's arms were round her, and her mother's face was against hers. It came over her again, as it had done in the water with such marvellous clearness, how perfect was the love that she had always had about her at home — the deep, deep, unchanging love. Tears flowed hotly down her cheeks, and she made no effort to wipe them away.

Somehow, when her mother's embrace relaxed, there was father, holding her hand very hard. Fanny stood beside the sofa, too, struggling with sobs. She bent and kissed Isabel on the cheek.

"Celia's at home in bed, poor dear!" said Mrs. Carleton, seeing Isabel's inquiring look. "She couldn't keep awake, try as hard as she would. She'll be over early in the morning — and Bobo, I suppose. You're to stay here to-night; and to-morrow I think we can take you home. Are you comfortable, dear?"

"Yes. Oh, mother! Rodney was wonderful. He wouldn't let me go. I wanted him to, but he

wouldn't. He held me, and held me,— and kept urging me to — to live a little longer —" A burst of hysterical tears cut short what she was saying.

"Don't think about it, sweetheart."

"No, I can't bear it. But — but — Molly and Eric,— tell me about them. We couldn't see them. They're safe, too?"

"Yes, quite safe."

"It's beautiful to know that they are, mother. I was horribly afraid that — something had happened — Molly said something so queer to me about 'the end,' and I kept thinking of it there in the water!"

"Don't! don't try to talk or think now." Mrs. Carleton's voice was that of one who can endure no more. "Go to sleep, and we'll talk in the morning."

Then there were hours more of heavy sleep.

CHAPTER XX

SURPRISES, PAINFUL AND PLEASANT

ISABEL lay in her own pretty room (which Cousin Eunice had insisted on giving up), staring numbly at the ceiling. It was the afternoon of the next day, and she was almost recovered from the physical hardships that she had endured. Aching joints and throbbing head were nothing compared to the anguish in her soul.

She had asked so many questions of her mother about Rodney, and how he was feeling, and when he would be out of doors, that Mrs. Carleton had resolved upon the truth. Sitting down on the bed, and taking Isabel's hands, she had said gently, "Dear, I must tell you that Rodney is very, very ill. He may not get well — the doctor does not think he will. But we must hope and pray, my child,— there is nothing else to do."

"*Mother!*" For a long time, Isabel could say nothing more. She sank back upon the pillow, and put her hands over her eyes. Her mother rose softly, and moved about, lifting the shade, so that the hazy sunlight might pour into the room, rearranging the flowers that the Harpers and the Mitchells and the Lenners had sent.

"It can't be, it *mustn't* be," said Isabel at last, in

a suffocated voice. "Oh, it couldn't, it *couldn't*, mother!"

"We don't know, dearest. We shall have to wait."

Just then Cousin Eunice came to the door, and called Mrs. Carleton out, and Isabel was left alone, staring at the ceiling. "It isn't fair — it isn't fair," was all she could think at first. "He's so fine and good, and he tried so hard to save me, not thinking of himself. His life is so worth while — it's right that he should live, and what's right must — *must* come true!"

She looked slowly about the room. There was the carved ivory frame on the dresser, with his picture in it. Rodney had given it to her for Christmas. And there were the books and the trinkets that he had given her for many Christmases before. The bunch of dance programmes that hung at the corner of the mirror were scrawled through with his name; and the row of funny postal-cards over the desk were reminders of jokes between them. On the table beside the window was the round box made of birch-bark and porcupine quills that he had bought of the Indians when he was out camping; she used it for her spools and needle-book. The dozen kodak-pictures that lay beside it he had given her only lately, for her album,— she hadn't found time to paste them in.

She had never quite realised how closely Rodney's friendship was interwoven with her life. She had taken it almost as a matter of course, as she did the

affection of her own family. There had been times, like that day among the pine woods and arbutus blossoms, when she had become more conscious of its value to her, and of the meaning it might have as they grew older; but she had not understood its hold upon her heart. Perhaps she did not even understand it now; she only felt that this friendship was too precious to let go. It must not be wrenched away from her just when she had begun to comprehend its beauty and its worth!

"Oh, God, don't let him die!" she prayed over and over for a long time.

And then, feeling more at peace, she turned on her side and watched the sun sinking lower and lower, a red disc in a bank of thin purple clouds.

Cousin Eunice came in with the wicker tray and a bowl of something steaming. "We thought you might like to be alone," she said quietly. "Are you all right, Goldilocks?"

"Yes, indeed, Mona Lisa," Isabel replied, giving Cousin Eunice the name that her love for Italy and her sad smile had won for her, "I'm almost myself again." Fanny came running in with a note and a bouquet from Monsieur D'Albert; and Rodney was not mentioned again that night.

The next day, and several days thereafter, she sat by the window in the willow chair, weak and tired, but not ill. She said little, but her thoughts were always on the friend that had saved her life. "Any news, mother?" she asked in the morning and at noon. Her heart had a frozen minute of fear,

until her mother answered, "Not very much. He keeps about the same." Isabel could not bear to ask or hear anything more.

If it had not been for this hovering horror, the days would have been pleasant enough. The family were in and out of the room, trying in every possible way to make her comfortable and happy. It was Cousin Eunice chiefly, who waited on her,— though Fanny ran up and down stairs till she felt, as she declared, exactly like a monkey on a stick. Mrs. Everard was always finding lovely and surprising things in her trunks, to show or lend to Isabel,— hand-embroidered chemises and nightgowns and negligees, lace handkerchiefs, silk stockings, sapphire and diamond rings, cameos, enamels, and lengths of lovely lace. And there were packs of postal cards from Europe and India and Egypt, and photographs that Cousin Henry had taken in his travels. And Cousin Eunice read to the dull-eyed convalescent, who hardly ever knew what the book was all about; and told her stories of foreign countries, till the fear that haunted her was, for a few moments at least, forgotten.

Celia sat on a stool beside her, and told her fairy stories, and brought Bobo to snuggle in her lap and purr his consolations. But all the time, there was a heavy heart beneath the lace-trimmed negligees and the filmy chiffon scarves that Cousin Eunice had hoped would prove diverting.

"I wonder if Molly is getting her courage back any faster than I am," Isabel sighed, as her mother

was tucking her into the willow chair on the fourth morning. "If my hands weren't so heavy I'd write her a note." She had not said much about Molly and Eric, because she had been told that they were safe, and her mind had been so full of Rodney.

Her mother gave her a queer look, of mingled uncertainty and pain. She opened her lips to speak, then closed them again, and bent lower to put a stool under Isabel's feet. Like a flash, Isabel understood.

"Are they gone, mother?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes, dear. Nobody will ever know just how it was. They were found — the next day."

"Oh, poor things! poor dear, dear Molly!" This new agony was too dreadful to be repressed. Isabel burst into tears and sobs that no caresses could quench. All the pent-up emotion of the last four days rushed to the surface, and whirled her away in uncontrollable vortexes of grief. Her hysterical crying brought father and Cousin Eunice, and eventually the doctor, and she was put to bed again for three more wretched days.

In the midst of the shock and sorrow of Molly and Eric's death was always the unspoken terror of something worse. She did not ask about Rodney now. If these two gentle and happy creatures could be taken away, one need not be surprised at whatever happened. She simply clenched her hands very hard, and tried to cry as softly as she could, be-

cause mother and father were so distressed at her weeping.

After a while she was able to sit up in bed again, and to make a show of interest in the flowers and notes and puddings and books and candy that well-meaning people sent.

One afternoon Fanny came in with a cup of tea in one hand, and Bobo under the other arm.

"Angel Child!" said Isabel with a touch of her old self in her voice.

Fanny set the cup down hard on the table, dropped the astonished Bobo with a thud on the floor, and burst into tears.

Isabel thought the worst. "It's happened, and they don't dare tell me," came to her with paralysing force. She was so stricken that she was almost calm. "What *is* it, Fanny?" she asked, choking.

"N-nothing," blubbered Fanny, putting her hands over her face to hide the tears; "nothing at all. It's just the way you said 'Angel Child'— just like your real self. Oh, it's been so awful — I can't stand it!"

"There's no bad news?" gasped Isabel.

"No — no. It was just that 'Angel Child.'"

Mopping her eyes, Fanny made a dash for Bobo, with such a sudden movement that the pampered cat, who had been standing stiff-legged in injured surprise, spat, bounced aside, and scrabbled out of the room with his tail as big as a scrubbing-brush.

Isabel and Fanny were both laughing when Pro-

fessor Carleton came in, much relieved at the gaiety that greeted him. He insisted on holding the tea-cup for Isabel to drink out of, as he had done when she was a little girl.

Just as the last drop had gone, and Isabel had wiped away what had dribbled down her chin, Mrs. Carleton came running up the stairs with her hat on. Her worn face was lighted with joy. She stood a moment in the door way, surveying the group, but not saying a word.

"What is it, Mumsey?" questioned Isabel, and she was not afraid to ask, so certain was the happiness in her mother's eyes.

"Rodney is out of danger!"

Each one of the four drew a long breath, and Mrs. Carleton sat down as if she were suddenly very tired.

"Hooray!" shouted Fanny, waving her wet handkerchief.

"Thank God!" said Professor Carleton fervently.

Isabel did not say anything. Her heart was too full, and she felt too strange and weak.

Somehow, in spite of the good news, Isabel did not get well so fast as everybody wanted and expected. Perhaps one should not say "get well," for she was not really ill — at least, she did not have any disease. She merely did not get strong, nor lose the miserable sense of heaviness that oppressed her. "I feel as if I weighed tons," she

exclaimed in vexation when she tried to get out of bed. "The life is all gone out of me. Do you suppose I'm always going to be like this?"

Cousin Eunice smiled, looking up from her crocheting. "Oh, no! You'll get your nervous energy back before long," she said. "You've had a good deal of a shock, but young people recover pretty rapidly."

"I wonder if I'll be able to begin work at the University," hesitated Isabel. "I had planned so many lovely things, you know, Cousin Eunice!" Only that morning she had had a letter from Evelyn Taylor, who was visiting at a summer cottage in the remotest depths of Michigan forests, and knew nothing of the accident on the lake. The letter was full of delightful hints as to what would happen when college began.

Cousin Eunice answered gravely, laying down her work, "We have been talking it over, and we hardly think it will be wise for you to try to take up the college work this semester. Cousin Arthur thinks that it isn't good policy to force the education of young girls, especially if they aren't perfectly well and strong. Now, you may be entirely recovered in a few weeks, but we don't want to take any chances."

Isabel had been sitting on the edge of the bed, but she sank back wretchedly among the pillows. "Oh! It doesn't seem as if I could bear giving up my plans for college," she wailed. "All the year we've been talking about the things that would happen in the

fall — Evelyn Taylor, and Fred Delafield, and Rodney, and Molly —"

The thought of Molly brought a paroxysm of the tears that came so easily now-a-days. Mrs. Everard sat down on the edge of the bed and put her arm around the girl's shoulders with tender solicitude, but she did not say much, except a few broken words of affection.

In the weeks that she had been with the Carletons, they had learned to love this beautiful dignified lady very much indeed. She had always lived in quiet luxury, yet she had always kept her hold on the true and simple things of life. Her thoughtfulness, her generosity, her unpretentious goodness seemed of infinitely more worth than all her elegance and culture. "I want to be like her!" Isabel had told her mother privately; and Fanny was the lady's dog and slave.

After a while, Isabel, subsiding into dullness, wiped her face with the dampened towel that Mrs. Everard brought, and lay back listening absently to the reading of a funny story. But she laughed in the wrong places, and didn't notice when Cousin Eunice had got to the end. She did not sleep much that night, but lay trying to master her disappointment, and to plan her occupation for the long semester when she should be out of school. "I wonder what Rodney expects to do?" she thought. But it was scarcely to be hoped that he could take up his college work before Thanksgiving. Perhaps he would try to begin then, and make up what he had

lost. It was not as if college were entirely new to him.

The next day Isabel noticed a kind of suppressed excitement in the faces of the family. She had become very sensitive to what was going on around her. Father came in with his hair very much rumpled, as if he had been running his fingers through it. He kissed her absently, said, "Well, well!" walked about the room, looked out of the window, said, "Well, well!" again, and went away.

Fanny ran down stairs to get the salt for Isabel's soft-boiled egg, came back without it, tipped over a glass of water, and said, as she was sopping up the flood, "Oh, isn't it wonderful!"

"Wonderful that you should tip over the water?" laughed Isabel impatiently, rescuing the toast from the tray. "There's nothing particularly astonishing about that."

"I meant something else," cried Fanny, going to hang the wet towel in the bath-room.

Presently Olga came to take away the breakfast tray, and then Mrs. Carleton entered the room. She carried a vase of flowers, which she set down on the desk; then she put it on the table, then took it up nervously and put it back on the desk again. She scarcely seemed to know what she was doing.

"There's a secret in the air," said Isabel at last, watching her mother's face. "Now, Mummy-Carl, I know as well as anything that there's a secret. It's a nice one, too, and very exciting, but rather dreadful. I insist on knowing what it is."

"Yes, there is a secret," Mrs. Carleton admitted with a kind of wistful happiness in her eyes. "And it *is* a nice one, but rather dreadful, too." She straightened the magazines on the table, and put up the window-shade, and then pulled it down again. She came over and patted the lace and ribbon boudoir-cap that Isabel was wearing. "I think I'll let Cousin Eunice tell you," she said soberly, and went swiftly out of the room.

Isabel was wondering what the news could be when Mrs. Everard came in, wearing her black silk gown, with the white organdie collar and cuffs. She stood at the foot of the bed, her face calm and beautiful, her dark "seeing" eyes, as Isabel called them, fixed on the questioning ones before her.

"My dear," she said serenely, "we have the most delightful plan for you."

"Oh, what is it?" Something of Isabel's old enthusiasm and eagerness had come back.

"You're going to Europe with me for a year — to France, and then to England, and Holland,— well, I don't know just where, but you're going, anyway."

"Going abroad! England! Paris!" gasped Isabel. "Oh, Cousin Eunice, with *you?*"

"That's just what you're going to do," replied Mrs. Everard, with a smile at Isabel's agitation.

For a moment the young semi-invalid lost her feeling of being made of lead, and sprang to a sitting posture, clasping her hands rapturously. "Do you

think I *can?*" she cried, half-incredulous of her good fortune.

"There isn't any reason in the world why you shouldn't."

"Except being a burden to you, and leaving father and mother — and the rest," said Isabel in a faint voice.

"You'd be a joy to me. You know how lonely I am." Mrs. Everard turned her face away to hide the trembling of her lips. She seldom spoke of her loneliness, but one saw it often in her eyes.

"It would be wonderful to be with you," responded Isabel softly. "And if I could do anything to make you happier —"

"You could — more than I can tell you."

"But leaving the family won't be easy."

"You have to forfeit something for everything you get, dear. That's my experience. Your father and mother want you to go. They think it would be the best thing in the world: a change of scene, and an opportunity to see some good art, and to learn some languages and a great many other things that would be of value to you."

"Including a course in manners and morals from one of the sweetest ladies living," added Isabel with a whimsical smile.

"I didn't hear them say that."

"But I'm sure they thought it."

"Well, it's settled, isn't it? We're going to Europe together!"

"It doesn't seem possible. I've always been mad to go, but I didn't think it would ever happen — not for years, anyway. Oh, Cousin Eunice, I haven't tried to thank you — I couldn't if I talked for a week."

"You can thank me by giving me your companionship while we are gone, and helping me to forget — what I have lost, and never had." Mrs. Everard smiled in a wistful way that was more sorrowful than tears.

"I'll try to give you the best there is in me," answered Isabel.

"Let's call your mother," said Mrs. Everard brightly. "There'll be dozens of things to talk over."

Mrs. Carleton was across the hall in her room, and came in looking very happy. She had, for the time, at least, conquered her sense of loss in Isabel's departure. The rest of the morning was a lively feminine babble about clothes, and luggage, and steamships, and tickets, and cathedrals, and art galleries, and then more about clothes and luggage.

In the afternoon Isabel felt so much better, although she stayed in bed, that Mrs. Mitchell and Billy Boy were permitted to come in for a short call; and Caroline Harper was in for fifteen minutes, too, for she was starting for Kentucky the next morning. They tried to talk about Caroline's school, and her aunts, and her summer visits; but they could think of nothing but Molly and Eric, and at last fell into a dreadful silence, because neither of them could

bear to speak. And then, to have something cheerful to say, Isabel told her news about going to Europe, feeling, somehow, no real triumph in Caroline's excited exclamations. She made Caroline promise not to tell, for she wanted to be talked about as little as possible; and, although she had not been told so, she knew from the notes from her schoolmates, and other indications, that the accident on the lake had created a painful sensation in the city of Jefferson.

The days that followed were busy but rather sad. Isabel was able now to be about for a few hours at a time; but she still felt languid and dull, and her nights were often sleepless and wretched.

Her first real out-door trip was when she and her mother went in a hired cab to see Rodney. His mother let them in and led the way to her sitting-room up-stairs.

Rodney was reclining on a *chaise longue,* with a blue-and-green checked shawl over his knees. There were red spots on his cheeks, and his eyes were very bright, but when he held out his hand, Isabel was startled to see how white and thin it was. She pressed it quickly and then dropped it, because it did not seem like Rodney's.

"Long time since we saw each other," he said briefly and rather awkwardly.

"Y-yes, it is," said the girl, overwhelmed with the memory of that terrible day on which she had caught a last glimpse of Rodney, being carried, stiff and dripping, from the old University boat-house.

It seemed a century since then, though it was somewhat less than a month. Isabel was dumb and shaking with nervousness, and could only look piteously at the young man lying so weakly on the couch, almost a caricature of the strong self-reliant Rodney of a few weeks before.

She was grateful when her mother stepped forward and took his hand, saying, "Rodney Fox, I'll always love you for saving my girl's life."

A wave of colour flooded Rodney's face. "I didn't do much," he said quietly. "There really wasn't much to do, Mrs. Carleton. All we could do was just to keep holding on until the launch could find us. Isabel was a brick. She didn't scream and struggle —"

"Oh, don't talk about it," begged the girl. "I can't bear it, and neither can you, Rodney."

"I think it's better to talk of something else," agreed Mrs. Fox, a plump, young-looking woman, who was standing at the head of Rodney's couch. "Let's pretend that nothing has happened. Just look at the things that Rod's fraternity friends have sent him! I'm getting such a houseful of stuff that I don't know what to do with it."

On the table at the other side of the sitting-room was a miscellaneous heap of articles,— books, magazines, pipes, baskets of fruit, boxes of figs and nuts and dates, gay silk socks, and a dark blue brocaded lounging jacket. "Rodney won't have it on," commented Mrs. Fox regretfully; "he insists on wearing that old brown corduroy, and you can't think

how aristocratic and interesting he looks in this." She looked over at him jestingly, for the dark blue jacket had been a subject of humourous contention. And then there were cushions with the University seal on them, and banners, and steins, a cigarette case — Rodney never smoked — leather slippers, and a dozen other things, big and small.

"I guess the fellows have gotten their dates mixed," laughed Rodney, with a kind of apology in his tone. "They seem to think it's Christmas."

Isabel stared at the gifts without seeing them. She had somehow thought that there would be a dramatic quality about this visit to Rodney; and though she had been dreading it as well as looking forward to it, she felt vaguely disappointed. She scarcely said anything when the conversation changed, and they sat talking of the opening of college, and the new professors who were coming, and of Monsieur D'Albert's approaching wedding.

"His *fiancée* arrives next week," said Mrs. Fox. "Rodney had a note from one of the Rambeau boys. The wedding's to be at the Rambeaus', very informally, as soon as she arrives."

Isabel had heard this news at home, for Monsieur had invited her father and mother and Cousin Eunice to be present at the ceremony. Not very long ago, it would have seemed intensely exciting, but now she scarcely gave it any attention. She looked over at Rodney, who smiled at her with a grimace, as much as to say, "Wasn't I a goose to be so jealous of Monsieur D'Albert!"

"We mustn't stay long or we'll tire your invalid," said Mrs. Carleton to Mrs. Fox. And then, turning to Isabel, "We must tell him the big news before we go."

Rodney looked up inquiringly.

"You tell, mother," said Isabel.

"She's going to Europe with Mrs. Everard."

A change passed over the face of the young man. There was a silence before he spoke. "Gee-whizz!" he said at last, with a long whistle. "That *is* big news. Are you really going, Isabel?"

"Yes. Isn't it too lovely!" Isabel answered, speaking very rapidly. "We're going to ever so many marvellous places — England and Belgium and Paris, and goodness knows where. I'm sure I don't deserve such luck, but Cousin Eunice says she really wants me. You know how crazy I've always been to go, and it seems like a fairy story come true."

"It's a little hard on the folks you leave behind you," said Rodney slowly.

"Oh, it won't be long." Isabel kept her voice up bravely. "A year is so short when you're having a good time."

"Yes, when you *are*," assented Rodney heavily. He seemed all at once to look pale and tired.

"We must be going," put in Mrs. Carleton, rising hastily. She turned to speak to Mrs. Fox.

"I'll see you before you go?" Rodney's eyes were on Isabel's face, and his voice was wistful.

"Oh, yes! as much as you're able — once, any-

way." She tried to be bright and cheerful, but felt that she was failing. A bit of the joy of going to Europe had departed.

Isabel and her mother rode home almost in silence, but Mrs. Carleton held her daughter's hand very close all the way.

Back at home, Isabel gave way to one of her painfully frequent fits of weeping. "Poor Molly! poor Molly!" she kept saying. And she was thinking in her heart, "Poor Molly! what a lot of happy sorrow, and sorrowful happiness she has missed!"

CHAPTER XXI

LAST DAYS

THE chronicle of Isabel's year is nearly finished. It would take too long to tell of the preparations for the trip, the gay and serious councils at home, the visits to shops and dressmakers, the calls, the telephone messages, and the running to and fro of those last days. Cousin Eunice always acted with despatch, and there was all too short a time between the decision and the departure.

Isabel had a new fall suit of serviceable blue serge, bought ready-made, but very trim and stylish. The blue felt hat with the green parrot's wing was very jaunty, throwing out the glint of her hair and the grey of her eyes. And then there were sundry blouses and shoes and gloves, and a pretty "all around" silk gown in dull green, with some of Cousin Eunice's real lace in yoke and cuffs. These things seemed to come as the delightful things do in a fairy tale.

"You look like the ladies on Fifth Avenue," said Fanny admiringly, standing off and gazing at her older sister, who was wearily surveying herself in the glass.

"I know I'll love my pretty things later," answered Isabel, "but just now everything seems too

much of an effort, even being excited over new clothes."

The mere thought of packing made her head hurt, but it was with something of eagerness that she watched her mother, marvelling at the skill with which blouses and underclothes and skirts were stowed away.

On one of these busy days, Monsieur D'Albert was happily married; and Isabel kept some of the wedding cake under her pillow for a night or two. She was vexed and relieved, however, to find that she could not remember what she dreamed.

Monsieur and Madame D'Albert came over to see her before she went. The bride was one of those "pale dark fascinating French girls" that Isabel had always pictured. She was charmingly shy, and very simple and genuine.

"I'm sure we should be very good friends if I were to stay," said Isabel in her hesitating French.

"We'll find a time for our friendship in another year," the gentle little bride responded, patting the girl's hand. "Perhaps there will be many years for us."

"*Sans doute!* Another year — and many," echoed Isabel, her soul leaping across the months in Europe, and returning home to Jefferson with impetuous joy.

In one of those last afternoons there was a talk with father, in his study, about pin-money and some other things. She must not be entirely dependent on Cousin Eunice, but must have the means of making

little gifts and charities, and of " picking up " a few pretty things that she felt she couldn't live without. The small packet of express checques that father gave her seemed very generous, but he promised more before the year was over. And then he had a word about working, when she was strong enough, and learning something of art and history, and acquiring all the skill in languages that she could.

" Make the most of your opportunities, my dear," he said, " without being too severe with yourself. Culture somehow escapes us if we try too hard to grasp it."

" It's culture enough to be with Cousin Eunice, don't you think, father? "

" I can't imagine anything better."

" And oh! talking of culture — you'll send me a copy of your book as soon as it's out, won't you? I'll be on pins till I get it."

" You 'll never read it, Plague-o'-my-Life," said Professor Carleton, teasingly. " What's the use of sending it to you? "

" I want it to look at, if nothing more. You will send me one, won't you? "

" Of course, Little One. Yours will be the very first copy that goes."

" And you'll write to me nearly every day, won't you, popsey — and tell me every single thing? Having letters from you will be one of the beautiful things about going away. Can you find time to write to me? "

" Yes, time for that, if nothing else. And we'll

be thinking about you every hour, no matter how busy we are, nor how far you are away!"

Isabel came and leaned over her father's chair, and put her arm around his neck. "Isn't it wonderful to love people, father," she said softly — "to give them the best there is in you, and to know that they are loving you back as hard as they can? It's the sweetest, finest thing in the world, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear, it is," the professor answered, reaching up for his daughter's hand. And for a long time they did not say anything, but each remained absorbed in thoughts for which they did not have words. To one the past and the present were lovely and satisfying; and to the other the future was a thing of exquisite mysteries, hallowed and glorified by love.

There was still a day left for the farewells to the family, when Isabel went with her mother to make a last call upon Rodney. She had seen him once or twice for a moment, but there had not been much time or strength for meeting. Now she had come to say good-bye for that short year that she was to spend abroad.

He was up and about the room, still in the old brown corduroy jacket. The red spots in his cheeks had given way to a more natural glow, and his eyes had lost their feverish gleam. He had been nervously turning over a book of Rackham drawings while he waited for his guests. When the bell rang, he said hurriedly to his mother, "Leave me alone with Isabel for a minute, won't you, mater? One

can't say good-bye with people standing around."

Mrs. Fox nodded understandingly, as she ran down to welcome the callers, whom the servant was letting in.

Isabel was conscious of looking very well in her new blue suit, and her cheeks had regained something of their normal colour in her walk through the stiff autumn breeze.

"You don't look as if you needed a trip for your health," said Rodney smilingly, as he shook hands.

"Neither do you, now," answered Isabel, "though you certainly did that first day that mother and I called."

"I'm as strong as a coal-heaver," Rodney replied, throwing back his shoulders, "and mother says I eat like two hired men in haying-time." He glanced over at the placid lady on the sofa, who beamed at him as doting mothers do.

"We shan't set you to heaving coal just yet, in spite of that appetite of yours," she said genially.

"Shall you try to go back to college this semester?" asked Mrs. Carleton.

"Yes, indeed. I'm going to have a tutor or two as soon as mother gets over worrying about me, and it won't take long to make up what I lose during the first few weeks of school. I shan't be very lonesome, for the fellows are beginning to come back. I had a letter from Fred yesterday," — he turned to speak to Isabel —"and he'll be here to-morrow. He said he and Evelyn would be down at the train to see you off."

"That'll be splendid," responded Isabel. "I had a letter from Evelyn. She had just heard —" It was hard to mention the terrible thing that had happened. And it would be a year now before she and Rodney could talk it over.

Rodney's face was grave. "Fred said to tell you that there was no use in his trying to say what he felt."

"I hope he won't try," said Isabel in a low voice. Mrs. Fox and Mrs. Carleton were talking about the wonderful successes of old Doctor Sheldon, who had attended Rodney in his illness.

"He won't," said Rodney to Isabel. "We men don't find it easy to say what we think."

"Sometimes we women can understand without being told," replied Isabel soberly.

Just then Mrs. Fox turned to speak to Isabel about Cousin Eunice, and to ask what boat they were sailing on. And the conversation became general, continuing so for the remaining half-hour of the call.

When Mrs. Carleton spoke of going, Mrs. Fox said easily, rising from the sofa, "You *must* see the new chintz curtains I've been putting up in my room. They're rather unusual, and a trifle daring; but I couldn't resist the chintz when I was shopping in Chicago this summer."

The two women went out to look at the curtains. Rodney and Isabel rose mechanically and stood looking at each other. There seemed so much to say,

and so little time to say it in. Besides, they were unskilled in making farewells.

"So it's good-bye," stammered Rodney, looking down into the grey eyes raised to his.

"It will have to be — for a while," said Isabel. She was fumbling shyly at the buttons on her coat.

"You'll see so many things, and meet so many people, and have so many interesting experiences — perhaps you'll forget us away back here in Jefferson."

Isabel's face softened, and her eyes were wistful. "As if I *could,* Rod!" Her heart was beating very fast. "*Nothing* can make any difference."

Rodney held out his hands, still thin and white, but firm and manly now, and Isabel gave him hers. "You won't forget me?" he asked, very quietly and tenderly.

"No, no, Rodney. How could I, after — after what we've suffered together!"

"But it's not all suffering. Isn't there happiness in it, too?"

"Yes, so much, Rodney." Isabel's voice was full and joyous.

"For me, too — so much! Don't, don't forget."

"No — never."

He stooped and kissed her very softly on the cheek.

The voices of the two women could be heard in the hall saying, "Then you really like them?" and, "Yes, I think the effect is excellent." Rodney and Isabel stepped back. When her mother entered,

Isabel was turning over the leaves of the Rackham book, and her eyes did not meet Rodney's.

"Have you seen this book, mother?" said Isabel in a tone so natural that it surprised herself. "It's awfully interesting."

"I wish we had time to look at it," said Mrs. Carleton, "but we really must go. Good-bye, Rodney. I hope we'll see you often, when you're out again."

"You surely will, Mrs. Carleton," answered Rodney heartily. Isabel was saying good-bye to Mrs. Fox.

Rodney and Isabel shook hands in an easy friendly fashion. "Good-bye," said the young man cheerfully. "Best wishes. I'm sorry I can't see you off, but mater won't allow it. You'll write, won't you, once in a dog's age? There'll be a steamer letter for you at the boat."

"Oh, yes! I'll write, when I haven't anything better to do," smiled the girl. "Jefferson will still be on the map!"

"Hope it'll stay there. Well, good-bye again."

"Good-bye!"

Isabel went downstairs and out into the bright fall sunshine with a feeling that was more elation than sadness. In her heart there was a strange, wonderful, exalting remembrance. It would stay hidden, growing dearer all the year — and there would be something beautiful to look forward to when she came back.

THE END

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